ÉMILE ÉDOUARD CHARLES ANTOINE ZOLA

SHAME

DEDICATION

To Édouard Manet

When from sheer indignation I took up the cudgels on behalf of your gifted work, I did not know you from Adam. But there were fools about bold enough to declare that you and I had been secretly in league, to achieve notoriety. Seeing that these idiots thus introduced us personally to one another, suppose we make it a permanent friendship? The *hoi polloi* have thus made me your friend, but, that being so, and the friendship put on a permanent basis, I would rather like to register the fact publicly by dedicating this work to you.

Émile Zola

September 1st, 1868

PREFACE

I HAD believed, naïvely, that this novel might do without a preface. It being my habit to say loudly and clearly what I think, and to emphasize even the smallest details of what I write, I had hoped to be understood and judged without need of prior explanation. It would seem that I was wrong.

The critics have given this book a hostile and indignant reception. Certain righteous individuals, writing in no less righteous newspapers, have picked it up between thumb and forefinger, screwed up their faces in disgust, and thrown it on the fire. Even the little literary rags, those same papers which every evening retail the latest gossip from bedrooms and private chambers, spoke of filth and stench and held their noses. I make no complaint about this reception; on the contrary, I am charmed to observe that my fellow-writers have the sensitive nerves of young girls. It is quite evident that my work belongs to my judges, and that they may find it nauseating without my having any right to object. I do, however, resent the fact that not one of the bashful journalists who have blushed whilst reading *Thérèse Raquin* seems to me to have understood the novel. If they had, they might well have blushed deeper, but at least I would now be enjoying the private satisfaction of seeing them disgusted for the right reasons. Nothing is more irritating than to hear honest writers loudly denouncing depravity when one is firmly persuaded they are doing so without knowing what it is they are calling depraved.

It is, therefore, necessary for me to introduce my work to my judges. I shall do so in a few lines only, and for the sole purpose of avoiding misunderstandings in the future.

In *Thérèse Raquin* I set out to study, not characters, but temperaments. Therein lies the whole essence of the book. I chose to portray individuals existing under the sovereign dominion of their nerves and their blood, devoid of free will and drawn into every act of their lives by the inescapable promptings of their flesh. Thérèse and Laurent are human

animals nothing more. In these animals I set out to trace, step by step, the hidden workings of the passions, the urges of instinct, and the derangements of the brain which follow on from a nervous crisis. Love, for my two heroes, is the satisfaction of a physical need; the murder they commit is a consequence of their adultery, a consequence they accept as wolves accept the slaughter of sheep; and last, what I have been obliged to call their remorse consists simply in an organic disorder, the revolt of a nervous system stretched to breaking point. There is a total absence of soul, as I will readily admit, for such was my intention.

I hope it is now becoming clear that my objective was first and foremost a scientific one. When I was creating my two characters, Thérèse and Laurent, I set myself a number of problems and then solved them for the interest of it: I tried, for instance, to explain the strange union that can come about between two different temperaments, and to show the profound disorders wrought in a sanguine nature through contact with a nervous one. If the novel is read with care it will be seen that each chapter is the study of a curious physiological case. In a word, I had only one aim, which was: given a powerful man and an unsatisfied woman, to seek within them the animal, and even to see in them only the animal, to plunge them together into a violent drama and then take scrupulous note of their sensations and their actions. I simply carried out on two living bodies the same analytical examination that surgeons perform on corpses.

You will agree that when one emerges from such a labour, still deeply absorbed in the earnest satisfactions of the quest for truth, it is indeed hard to bear accusations that one's only aim was to paint obscene pictures. I found myself in the same position as those artists who copy the nude body without feeling the least stirring of desire, and are completely taken aback when a critic declares himself scandalized by the living flesh depicted in their work. While I was writing *Thérèse Raquin* I was lost to the world, completely engrossed in my exact and meticulous copying of real life and my analysis of the human mechanism, and I assure you that the cruel sexual passion of Thérèse and Laurent had for me nothing immoral about it, nothing which might excite unacceptable desires in others.

The humanity of the models disappeared for me as it does for the artist who has a naked woman stretched out before him, and whose only thought is to put down on his canvas the truth of her form and coloration. Great, therefore, was my surprise when I heard my work called a cesspit of blood and filth, a stinking sewer, an abomination, and I forget what else. I know the delightful rules of the critical game, and have even played it myself; but I admit that I was somewhat disconcerted by the unanimity of the attack. Was there not a single one of my fellow-writers prepared at least to explain my book, if not actually to defend it? Among the chorus of voices crying out, 'the author of *Thésèse Raquin* is a wretched hysteric who delights in flaunting his pornography in public', I waited in vain for someone to say: 'No, you are wrong, this writer is just an analyst, one who may perhaps have become engrossed in human rottenness, but only in the same way as a doctor lecturing to students about disease.'

Note that I am in no way asking the press to respond favourably to a work which, so they claim, their delicate senses find repugnant. I cannot aspire so high. I am merely astonished that my fellow-writers, whose practised eye ought to let them recognize a novelist's intentions within the first ten pages, should have made of me a sort of literary sewer-worker, and I am content to beg them humbly in the future to be good enough to see me as I am, and discuss my work for what it is.

Yet it would have been so easy to understand *Thérèse Raquin*, to observe and analyse the book and point out to me its real faults, without immediately picking up a handful of mud to fling in my face in the name of morality. What was required was a little intelligence and a few real critical ideas. Accusations of immorality, in the field of science, prove absolutely nothing. I do not know whether my novel is immoral; I admit that I never worried about making it more or less chaste. What I do know is that I never for one minute set out to put in the filth that moral people are now discovering in it; that I wrote every scene, even the most torrid ones, with the sole curiosity of the scientist; and that I defy my judges to find in it a single genuinely licentious page, of the kind enjoyed by readers of those titillating little novels which peddle the

indiscretions of boudoir and back stage, sell ten thousand copies, and are warmly recommended by the same newspapers nauseated by the truths I have presented in *Thérèse Raquin*.

A few insults and many fatuous remarks are, therefore, all that I have read to date about my work. I say this quite calmly, as I would to a friend who had asked me privately what I thought about the critics' attitude towards me. A highly talented writer to whom I was complaining about the lack of understanding I had received gave me this profound reply: 'You have one tremendous failing which will close everyone's door to you: you are unable to talk to an idiot for two minutes without letting him know that you consider him such.' That cannot be helped; I know the disservice I am doing myself by accusing the critics of lacking intelligence, and yet I am unable to prevent myself from showing the contempt I feel for their narrow outlook and their blind, completely unsystematic way of judging. I am, of course, speaking here of critics in the popular press, who judge with all the literary prejudices of fools, incapable as they are of adopting the broader human perspective required to understand a truly human work. Never have I witnessed such incompetence. The few blows these petty critics aimed at me when *Thérèse Raquin* came out struck, as always, only thin air. Their judgement is always wide of the mark; they are capable of applauding the pirouettes of some heavily powdered actress one moment and screaming about the immorality of a study in physiology the next; they understand nothing, want to understand nothing, and are forever lashing out at the first target put up by their panicky stupidity. It is exasperating to be punished for a crime of which one is absolutely innocent. There are moments when I actually regret not having put in a few obscenities; I would almost be happier with a well-deserved thrashing than see these stupid attacks continue to rain down about my head like tiles off a roof, without knowing why.

In our age there are scarcely two or three men capable of reading, understanding, and judging a book.* From them I am prepared to hear criticism, convinced as I am that they will not speak without having understood my intentions and weighed the results of my efforts. They would certainly refrain

from using those great empty words morality and literary modesty; they would recognize my right, in these times of freedom in the arts, to choose those subjects I see fit, demanding only that the resulting works be produced in good conscience, and knowing that stupidity alone is damaging to the dignity of literature. They would certainly not be surprised by the scientific analysis that I have attempted to apply in *Thérèse Raquin*; they would see it as an example of the modern method, an application of the universal investigative tool which our century is using with such passion to lay bare the secrets of the future. Whatever might be their conclusions, they would accept my starting-point, the study of the temperaments and the profound modifications brought about in the human organism by the pressure of surroundings and circumstances. I should be facing true judges, men seeking the truth in good faith, with no puerility or false shame, and no thought of having to feign disgust before naked, living, anatomical specimens. Sincere study, like fire, purifies all. Of course, my work would stand most humbly before the court which I now have the pleasure of imagining; I would call down on it the full severity of the critics, I would wish it to emerge black with crossings-out. But at least I would have known the profound joy of being criticized for what I had attempted to achieve, and not for something I had not done.

I seem already to hear the verdict of the great critics, those of the methodical, Naturalist school which has brought about the renewal of the sciences; history, and literature: '*Thérèse Raquin* is the study of too exceptional a case; the drama of modern life is more various than this, not limited to the horror and madness portrayed here. Cases of this sort belong more in the background of the book. The desire not to let any of his observations go to waste has led the author to stress each tiny detail, and over-do the tension and harshness of the work as a whole. Moreover, the style does not have the simplicity necessary in a work of analysis. In short, if the author now wishes to write a good novel, he should try to take a broader view of society, to depict it in its many and varied aspects, and above all to write in a more precise, natural manner.'*

My intention was to make a brief reply to certain attacks irritating in their bad faith, and I see that I am now beginning

to debate with myself, as I always do when I keep pen in hand for too long. I know how much that annoys readers, so I shall stop. If I had the will and the leisure to write a manifesto, I would perhaps have tried to defend what one journalist, writing about *Thérèse Raquin*, has called 'putrid literature'* of this type. Then again, why should I bother? The group of Naturalist writers to which I have the honour of belonging is courageous and active enough to produce powerful works containing within them their own defence. It takes all the blind prejudice a certain brand of criticism can muster to force a novelist into writing a preface. Since from a simple love of accuracy I have committed the error of doing so, I beg to be excused by intelligent people who, in order to see clearly, do not need to have a lantern lit for them in broad daylight.

Émile Zola

15 April 1868

BOOK I

THÉRÈSE RAQUIN

I

AT the end of the Rue Guénégaud, coming up from the river, can be found the Passage du Pont-Neuf,* a sort of dark, narrow corridor running between the Rue Mazarine and the Rue de Seine. This arcade is some thirty paces long and no more than two wide; it is paved with yellowish flagstones, worn, uneven, permanently exuding an acrid-smelling damp, and is covered by a right-angled glass roof black with grime.

On fine summer days when the sun beats oppressively down on the streets outside, a pallid light filters in through the filthy panes and lingers miserably in the passage. On foul winter days or on foggy mornings, the glass casts nothing but darkness on the sticky flags beneath, a vile and murky darkness.

Let into the wall on the left there are a number of shops, dark, low, and cramped, from which chill draughts emerge as if from a vault. These shops sell second-hand books, children's toys, and stationery, and their grey, dust-laden displays doze dimly in the gloom; the windows, a mass of tiny panes, mottle the merchandise inside with strange greenish reflections, while, in the shadowy and lugubrious depths beyond, strange shapes can be seen moving.

All along the right-hand wall of the passage, stall-holders have fixed shallow cupboards in which nameless objects, goods forgotten since they were put there twenty years before, lie strewn along flimsy shelves painted an ugly brown colour. From one such cupboard a woman plies her trade in costume jewellery, selling cheap rings delicately laid out on blue velvet cushions in mahogany boxes.

Above the glazed roof the wall rises towards the sky, black and coarsely rendered, as if covered with leprous sores and zigzagged with scars.

The Passage du Pont-Neuf is not a place where people go for a stroll. It is a short cut, a way of saving a few minutes. Those who pass through it are busy people whose sole concern is to get where they are going as quickly as possible. There

are apprentices in their labourers' aprons, seamstresses returning work they have finished, men and women with parcels under their arms; old men dragging themselves along in the dismal half-light which filters through the glass roof, and bands of children who come there after school to lark about, running up and down the flagstones in a clatter of clogs. All day long there can be heard the same irritatingly irregular patter of footsteps hurrying along the passage; nobody ever stops to talk; everyone goes quickly about his or her business, head down, at a brisk pace, without so much as a glance at the shops. The shopkeepers look anxiously at any passer-by who, by some miracle, happens to stop in front of their window.

In the evening the arcade is lit by three heavy, square-shaped gas lanterns hanging down from the glazed roof, on which they cast lurid patches of light, while only a pale glow falls on the pavement below in dim, flickering pools which sometimes disappear almost completely. This gives the arcade the menacing feel of a cut-throats' alley; long shadows slide along the flags, damp draughts come in off the street, and the whole place feels like some underground gallery dimly lit by three funeral lamps. The shopkeepers make do with the feeble rays which come in through their windows, lighting only one shaded lamp for the shop, which they place on the corner of the counter; this allows passers-by to make out what there is in the depths of these warrens where darkness is at home in the middle of the day. Along the gloomy line of shop-fronts the stationer's windows are a blaze of light, as two shale-oil lamps pierce the shadows with their yellow flames. And on the other side a candle, stuck in the middle of a lamp-glass, spangles the box of costume jewellery with reflections, while its proprietress dozes at the back of her stall, her hands hidden under a shawl.

A few years ago there stood opposite this stall a shop whose bottle-green woodwork exuded damp from all its cracks. Its sign was a long, narrow plank which bore the word HABERDASHERY in black letters, and on one of the glass panes of the door a woman's name was painted, in red: THÉRÈSE RAQUIN. The deep recesses of the windows to left and right were laid out with blue paper.

During the day, only the window display itself could be made out in the hazy half-light.

On one side there were items of clothing: fluted tulle bonnets at two or three francs apiece, muslin collars and cuffs, woollen cardigans, stockings, socks, and braces. Each item, yellowed and creased, hung pathetically from a little wire hook, filling the window from top to bottom with whitish odds and ends which took on a lugubrious appearance in the transparent gloom. The new bonnets, of a brighter white, stood out starkly against the blue paper which covered the boards, while coloured socks, hanging down from a horizontal wire, sounded a darker note amid the wan, indistinct blankness of the muslin.

In the narrower window on the other side were shelves covered in fat skeins of green wool, black buttons sewn on to white card, boxes of all sizes and colours, hairnets with steel beads laid out on circles of bluish paper, fan-shaped arrays of knitting needles, tapestry patterns, spools of ribbon, heaps of dull and faded objects which had doubtless lain dormant in the same place for the last five or six years. Everything in this display case decaying with dust and damp had turned the same shade of dirty grey.

Near noon in summer, when the sun's glaring rays burned down on the squares and streets outside, one could discern, behind the bonnets of the first window, the pale, serious profile of a young woman, outlined vaguely against the dark shadows which filled the shop. Jutting from beneath the low, steeply sloping brow was a long, narrow, pointed nose; the lips were two thin, pale-pink lines and the chin, short and nervous, was joined to the neck by a broad, supple curve. The body blended into the shadows and could not be seen; all that was visible was the dim whiteness of the profile, with the black hole of a wide-open eye in the middle and a dark mass of hair piled up on top. There it remained, peaceful and unmoving for hours on end, between two bonnets on which the damp metal runner had left a rusty stripe.

In the evening, once the lamp had been lit, the interior of the shop could be seen. It was wider than it was deep; at one end stood a small counter; at the other, a spiral staircase led up to the bedrooms on the first floor. All around the walls were display cases, cupboards, and rows of boxes; four tables and chairs made up the rest of the furniture. The room had a bare,

chill appearance; the stock was not allowed to lie about in a riot of gay colours, but was all carefully parcelled up and packed away in corners.

There were usually two women sitting behind the counter: the young one with the serious profile and an old lady who sat dozing with a smile on her face. The latter was around sixty years old; her placid, fleshy face looked white in the lamplight. A large tabby cat sat perched on the corner of the counter, watching her as she slept.

In front of the high counter a man of about thirty would sit reading or talking in a low voice to the young woman. He was short, puny and of languid appearance; with his dull blond hair, sparse beard, and heavily freckled face he looked like a spoilt, sickly child.

Shortly before ten o'clock the old lady would wake up. The shop was shut, and then the whole family went upstairs to bed. The tabby cat followed its owners, purring and rubbing its head against each banister as it went.

Upstairs there were three rooms. The staircase led up to a dining-room which was also used as a living-room. To the left, a porcelain stove stood in an alcove; opposite it was a sideboard; chairs were lined up along the walls and a folding circular table occupied the middle of the room. At one end, behind a glass partition, was a dark kitchen. On either side of the dining-room there was a bedroom.

After kissing her son and daughter-in-law good night, the old lady would retire to her room. The cat always fell asleep on a chair in the kitchen. The married couple went into their own room, which had a second door leading out on to a back staircase, from the bottom of which a dark, narrow passage led back into the arcade.

The husband, who was perpetually shivering with fever, would go to bed, while the young wife opened the window to close the shutters. She would stand there for a few minutes, facing the great black, coarsely rendered wall which reached high up into the sky above the roof of the arcade. After gazing vacantly at the wall she too would go to bed, with an expression of disdain and indifference on her face.

II

MADAME Raquin was a former haberdasher from Vernon,* where for nearly twenty-five years she had run a small shop. A few years after the death of her husband she had become tired of the business and sold off her stock. Her savings, combined with the proceeds of the sale, left her with a capital of forty thousand francs, which she invested, giving her a pension of two thousand a year. This sum was more than adequate for her needs. She lived the life of a recluse, untouched by the poignant joys and sorrows of the world; she had made for herself an existence full of peace and happy tranquillity.

For four hundred francs a month she rented a small house with a garden running down to the banks of the Seine. It was a private, enclosed retreat with a vague scent of the nunnery about it, surrounded by broad meadows and approached by a narrow path; the windows of the building looked out over the river and the deserted little hills on the other bank. The good lady, now past fifty, buried herself away in this solitude, living a life of serene contentment in the company of her son Camille and her niece Thérèse.

By then Camille was twenty. His mother still treated him like a spoilt little boy. She adored him because she had struggled to keep him alive through a youth full of pain and sickness. The child had had every imaginable type of fever and illness, one after the other, and Madame Raquin had put up a fifteen-year fight against the sequence of fearful maladies which had threatened to snatch her son from her. She had overcome them all with her patience, care, and adoring devotion.

When Camille grew up his life was no longer in danger, but the repeated onslaught of illness and pain had left his body in a delicate state. His growth had been stunted, so that he remained small and sickly looking; the movements of his skinny limbs were slow and tired. His mother loved him all the more for his weakness and debilitation. She looked on his poor, pale little face with triumphant tenderness and

thought how she had given him life at least a dozen times over.

During his rare periods of respite from illness, the child had attended classes at a commercial school in Vernon, where he was taught spelling and arithmetic. His entire learning consisted of basic sums and a very superficial grasp of grammar. Later on, he took lessons in bookkeeping and accounting. Whenever Madame Raquin was advised to send her son away to boarding school, she began to shake with fear: she knew that he would die away from her, and always said that books would kill him. Camille remained ignorant, and his ignorance was just one more weakness in him.

At the age of eighteen, at a loss for what to do with himself and bored to death by the protective atmosphere with which his mother surrounded him, he went to work as a cloth merchant's clerk at sixty francs a month. His restless nature made idleness unbearable to him, and he felt much better, much calmer, toiling away like a brute in the office, craning his neck over bills all day long and picking his way meticulously through great lists of figures to be added up. In the evenings, worn out and with his mind a complete blank, he would savour with infinite pleasure the vacant feeling which took possession of him. He had had to argue with his mother about the job; she wanted to keep him for ever by her side, wrapped up in blankets and well away from life's accidents. So he spoke to her with a voice of authority, demanding work as other children demand toys, not out of duty but instinctively, as a natural need. His mother's devotion and tenderness had made him fiercely egotistical; he thought he loved the people who pitied him and were nice to him, but in fact he lived a life apart, shut up in himself, loving only his own well-being and seeking, by all possible means, to increase his own pleasures. Once Madame Raquin's tender-hearted doting had begun to revolt him, he had thrown himself joyfully into a stupid occupation which allowed him to escape from her constant round of medicines and herbal infusions. Then, in the evenings, when he came home from the office, he would run down to the banks of the Seine with his cousin Thérèse.

Thérèse was almost eighteen. One day sixteen years before, when Madame Raquin was still working as a haberdasher,

her brother, Captain Degans, had brought a little girl to her in his arms. He had just arrived back from Algeria.

'You are this child's aunt,' he told her with a smile. 'Her mother is dead ... I don't know what to do with her. You can have her.'

The haberdasher took the child, smiling at her and kissing her pink cheeks. Degans stayed a week at Vernon. His sister asked him scarcely anything about the little girl he had given her. She was told vaguely that the dear little thing was born at Oran and that her mother was a native woman of great beauty. An hour before leaving, the Captain gave her a birth certificate on which the child was recognized as his and bore his name. He left and was never seen again; a few years later he was killed in Africa.

Thérèse grew up sleeping in the same bed as Camille and enveloped in her aunt's clinging devotion to him. Although she was strong and healthy she was looked after like a sickly child, sharing the medicines which her cousin had to take, and obliged to spend her time in the overheated atmosphere of the bedroom where the sick boy lived. For hours on end she would squat pensively in front of the fire, staring straight into the flames without blinking. This life of enforced convalescence made her turn in on herself; she developed a habit of speaking in an undertone, walking about the house without making any noise, and sitting silent and motionless on a chair with a vacant look in her eyes. Yet whenever she lifted an arm or moved a foot forward, it was apparent that she had all the litheness of a cat, with taut, powerful muscles and a store of passion and energy which lay dormant in her inert body. One day her cousin had an attack of dizziness and fell over; in one quick movement she picked him up and carried him back, and this sudden exertion brought a great warm flush to her cheeks. The cloistered life that she led and the debilitating regime to which she was subjected were not able to weaken her tough, resilient frame, but her face had taken on a pale, slightly yellowish complexion and when the light was low she could look almost ugly. Sometimes she would go to the window and stare out at the houses opposite, bathed in golden sunlight.

When Madame Raquin sold up her business and retired

to the little house by the river, Thérèse's heart secretly jumped for joy. Her aunt had so often told her: 'Sit still, don't make a noise,' that she always took care to keep the impetuous side of her nature hidden away deep within her. She possessed supreme self-control, and an apparent calmness which concealed a tendency to terrible fits of passion. She felt penned in her cousin's room the whole time, looking after a child constantly at death's door, and she had the careful movements, placid, silent air, and halting speech of an old woman. When she saw the garden, the white river, and the expanse of green hills rolling away to the horizon, she was seized by a wild urge to shout and run about; she felt her heart throbbing harder in her breast, but not a muscle moved in her face, and when her aunt asked whether she liked their new home, all she did was smile.

From then on, life improved for her. She kept her lithe appearance and calm, indifferent expression, and she remained the child who had been brought up sleeping in an invalid's bed; but inside herself she could begin living her own burning and passionate existence. When she was down by the water's edge on her own she would lie full-length in the grass like an animal, her black eyes wide open, her body twisted in readiness to pounce. And there she would stay for hours, thinking about nothing in particular, feeling the bite of the sun's rays on her body, happy just to dig her fingers into the earth. She dreamed crazy dreams; she would stare defiantly at the rumbling river and imagine that the water was about to leap up and attack her; then she would stiffen into a defensive posture, asking herself furiously how the waters could be tamed.

In the evenings Thérèse, calm and silent again, would sit by her aunt and do needlework, seeming to doze, with her face lit by the soft glow from the lamp, while Camille, slumped deep in an armchair, meditated about his ledgers. The occasional word spoken in a low voice was all that disturbed the peace of this sleepy interior scene.

Madame Raquin looked on her children with serene benevolence. She had resolved to pair them off in marriage. She still treated her son as if he were at death's door, and trembled whenever the thought struck her that one day she would die, leaving him ill and alone. In her mind she always counted

on Thérèse, telling herself that the girl would be a watchful nurse at Camille's side. Her niece, with her air of calm and uncomplaining devotion, inspired unbounded confidence in her. She had seen her at work, and wanted to give her to her son as his guardian angel. Their marriage was a foregone conclusion.

As children they had known for a long time that one day they were to wed each other. They had grown up with this idea, which had become natural and familiar to them. In the family, the match was spoken of as something necessary and inevitable. Madame Raquin had said: 'We shall wait until Thérèse is twenty-one.' And they waited patiently, without blushes or excitement.

Camille, whose illness had impoverished his blood, knew nothing of the keen desires of adolescence. He still behaved like a little boy towards his cousin, kissing her in the same way as he kissed his mother, purely from habit, never losing his self-centred calm. He regarded her as a playmate who stopped him from getting too bored, and who would sometimes make his herbal tea for him. When he played with her and held her in his arms, he thought he was holding another boy, and felt no stirrings of the flesh. At such moments, it never occurred to him to kiss Thérèse on her warm lips, while she struggled beneath him, laughing nervously.

The girl, too, seemed always to remain cold and indifferent. Sometimes she would fix her large eyes on Camille and stare at him for several minutes with supreme unconcern, only her lips making almost imperceptible movements. No feelings could be read in this inscrutable face, on which a constantly gentle and attentive expression was maintained by an implacable will. Whenever her marriage was mentioned, Thérèse would look grave and simply nod in agreement with everything that Madame Raquin said. Camille would go to sleep.

On summer evenings the two young people would run off down to the water's edge. Camille was irritated by his mother's constant fussing; he had rebellious moments when he wanted to rush about and make himself ill, just to escape from her cloying attentions which were starting to make him feel sick. Then he would drag Thérèse off and challenge her to wrestle with him in the grass. One day he gave his cousin a push and

she fell over; she leapt up at once like a wild animal, with her cheeks red and eyes blazing with anger, and threw herself on him with both fists raised. Camille slid to the ground. He was scared.

Months, years passed. The day fixed for the wedding arrived. Madame Raquin took Thérèse to one side and told her about her father and mother, and the whole story of her birth. The girl listened to what her aunt had to say, then kissed her without uttering a word.

That night, instead of going into her own bedroom, which was on the left at the top of the stairs, she went into her cousin's, on the right. That was the only change in her life. The following morning when the young couple came downstairs, Camille still had the same sickly languor about him and the same egotistical tranquillity of mind, while Thérèse had lost neither her mild indifference nor her restrained, frighteningly calm expression.

III

A WEEK after his wedding Camille informed his mother bluntly that he intended to leave Vernon and go to live in Paris. Madame Raquin would not hear of it; she had her existence all planned out, and she absolutely refused to change the least detail of it. Her son threw a tantrum and threatened to make himself ill unless she gave in to his whim.

'I never stood in the way of your plans,' he told her. 'I married my cousin and took all the medicines you gave me. Now that I want to do something of my own, the least you can do is agree with me . . . We leave at the end of the month.'

That night, Madame Raquin did not sleep a wink. Camille's decision had turned her whole life upside down and she was looking desperately for a way of putting it back together again. Gradually she calmed down. It occurred to her that the young couple might have children, and that her little fortune would then no longer be enough. She would have to earn more money, go back into business, and find some well-paid occupation for Thérèse. By the next day she had grown used to the idea, and made plans for a new life.

At lunch she was full of enthusiasm.

'Here's what we'll do', she said to her children. 'I'll go to Paris tomorrow and look for a little haberdashery business, and Thérèse and I will set ourselves up again selling needles and thread. That will keep us out of mischief. You, Camille, can do whatever you want—stroll about in the sunshine, or find yourself a job.'

'I shall find a job,' replied the young man.

The truth was that only stupid ambition had driven Camille to think of leaving. He wanted to be an employee in some large administration, and would go pink with pleasure at the thought of himself sitting in the middle of a huge office, wearing shiny artificial cuffs and with a quill pen tucked behind his ear.

Thérèse was not consulted. She had always shown such pas-

sive obedience that her mother and her husband no longer took the trouble to ask her opinion. She went wherever they went and did what they did without complaint or reproach, and without even seeming to notice that she was going somewhere else.

Madame Raquin went to Paris and headed straight for the Passage du Pont-Neuf. An elderly spinster from Vernon had given her the address of a relative there who ran a haberdashery business which she was intending to sell. Madame Raquin found the shop rather small and dark, but while crossing Paris she had been frightened by the noise and bustle in the streets and the luxurious shops, and this narrow arcade with its modest window displays reminded her of the premises she had had before, so quiet and peaceful. She felt as though she were still in the provinces; she breathed freely again at the thought that her children would be happy in this forgotten corner of Paris. The modest price of the stock made her mind up for her: they were asking two thousand francs. The rent for the shop and the flat above was only twelve hundred a year. As she had almost four thousand francs in savings, she calculated that she could buy the stock and pay the first year's rent without eating into her capital. Camille's salary and the profits from the haberdashery business would suffice for their everyday needs, she reckoned, so that she would no longer need to draw her pension, which could be laid down as capital to increase her grandchildren's inheritance.

She returned to Vernon in a glow of satisfaction, telling everyone what a pearl of a place she had found, a perfect spot right in the middle of Paris. Gradually, during her evening conversations over the next few days, the damp and dingy shop in the arcade turned into a palace; she saw it in her mind's eye as convenient, spacious, and quiet, with a thousand inestimable advantages.

'Oh my dear Thérèse,' she exclaimed, 'we are going to be happy there, you can be sure of that! There are three fine rooms upstairs . . . The arcade is full of people . . . We'll make lovely window displays . . . You'll see, we'll have lots to do!'

She could not stop talking. All her old shopkeeper's instincts had been reawakened; she began to give Thérèse advice in advance about buying and selling, and all the little tricks of

running a business. At last it was time for the family to leave the house on the banks of the Seine; that same evening, they moved into the Passage du Pont-Neuf.

When Thérèse walked into the shop which was to be her home from now on, she felt as if she were dropping into the clinging earth of a grave. A sense of revulsion seized her throat and she shivered with fear. She stared at the damp and dirty arcade, examined the shop, went upstairs, looked over each room; the loneliness and dilapidation of this bare, unfurnished apartment was terrifying. The young woman could find nothing to say, not a gesture to make. She was as if frozen with horror. When her aunt and her husband had gone back downstairs, she sat down on a trunk, her hands tensed, half choked by sobs but unable to cry.

Faced with the reality of their situation, Madame Raquin was embarrassed and ashamed of her dreams. She tried to defend her decision, finding a solution to each new difficulty that arose. She explained away the gloom by saying that the sky was overcast, and finished by saying that all that the place needed was a good sweeping out.

'Who cares,' replied Camille, 'it seems quite all right ... Anyway, we'll only be coming up here in the evening. I won't be back before five or six o'clock ... You two will be together; you won't get bored.'

The young man would never have agreed to live in such a squalid hovel if he had not counted on having a snug and comfortable office to work in. He told himself he would be warm there all day long and would go to bed early in the evening.

For a whole week, the shop and the flat above were in a state of chaos. On the very first day Thérèse had sat herself down behind the counter, and there she stayed. Madame Raquin was astonished at her passivity; she had thought that the young woman would try to bring a touch of beauty to her home, putting flowers in the windows and asking for new wallpaper, curtains, and carpets. But whenever she suggested a repair or improvement, her niece would reply calmly:

'Why bother? We are quite all right as we are; we've no need of luxuries.'

It was Madame Raquin who had to arrange the bedrooms

and sort things out in the shop. In the end, the sight of her constantly running round in circles started to irritate Thérèse; she took on a cleaning woman and forced her aunt to sit down by her side.

Camille went for a good month without finding a job. He strolled about all day long, spending as little time as possible in the shop. He became so bored that he began to talk of going back to Vernon. Finally he found a position with the Orleans Railway,* at one hundred francs per month. His dream had come true.

He left for work at eight o'clock each morning. After going down the Rue Guénégaud, he found himself by the river. Then he would amble along the Seine with his hands in his pockets, from the Institute* to the Jardin des Plantes.* He never grew bored of this long walk, which he did twice a day. He would watch the flow of the current and stop to look at the timber barges going downstream, thinking about nothing in particular. Often he would stand in front of Notre-Dame and contemplate the scaffolding surrounding the cathedral, for at that time it was under repair; he liked looking at the thick wooden beams, without knowing why. Then he would glance at the Port aux Vins* as he passed, and count the cabs emerging from the station.* In the evening, worn out and with his head full of some idiotic story he had been told at work, he would cross the Jardin des Plantes, stopping to look at the bears if he was not in too much of a hurry. He would stay leaning over the edge of the pit for half an hour at a time, watching the great beasts lumbering about; their ponderous gait amused him; as he examined their movements, open-mouthed and with his eyes popping out of his head, he was filled with a kind of imbecilic joy. At last he would make up his mind to set off home, dragging his feet and staring curiously at passers-by, carriages, and shops as he went.

As soon as he got home he would eat and start reading. He had bought the complete works of Buffon* and every evening he set himself to read twenty or thirty pages, although he found it very boring. He also read the *History of the Consulate and Empire* by Thiers* and Lamartine's *History of the Girondins*,* as well as works of popularized science, all of which he bought in penny instalments. He thought he was working

to improve his education. Sometimes he would force his wife to listen as he read out particular pages or anecdotes. He was very surprised to find that Thérèse was able to sit silent and pensive for a whole evening, without feeling any urge to pick up a book, and admitted to himself that his wife was basically not very bright.

Thérèse rejected his books impatiently. She preferred to sit doing nothing, staring into space and letting her mind wander aimlessly. In any event, her mood always remained balanced and amenable; she devoted all her will-power to making herself into a passive instrument, completely acquiescent, a model of abnegation.

Business was slow but steady. The profits were always the same from month to month. The clientele was made up of working women from the neighbourhood. Every five minutes or so a girl would come in and buy a few penceworth of goods. Thérèse served all the customers with the same phrases and her lips wore the same mechanical smile. Madame Raquin was more flexible and chattier, and it was really she who attracted people in and made them into regular customers.

Three years passed in an unchanging sequence of days. Camille never once stayed away from the office; his mother and wife scarcely ever left the shop. Thérèse, living amidst the damp and gloom in an oppressive, dismal silence, saw life stretching out pointlessly ahead of her, with every evening bringing the same cold bed and every morning the same empty day ahead.

IV

ONCE a week, on Thursdays, the Raquins had guests round for the evening. The large lamp would be lit in the dining-room and a kettle put on the fire to make tea. It was all a great carry-on. These Thursday evenings stood out from all the others in the week; they became something of a habit with the family, a kind of entertaining but highly respectable orgy. Everyone stayed up until eleven.

Madame Raquin had discovered that one of her old friends, police superintendent Michaud, was living in Paris; he had been stationed in Vernon for twenty years, and had lodged in the same house as her. For this reason a close friendship had grown up between them; but once the widow had sold her shop and gone to live in the house by the river, they had gradually lost touch with each other. Michaud had moved a few months later from the provinces to Paris, to the Rue de Seine, there to live quietly on the fifteen hundred francs a month of his pension. One day when it was raining, he bumped into his old friend in the Passage du Pont-Neuf, and that same evening he came to dinner with the Raquins.

Such was the origin of the Thursday receptions. The former police superintendent made a habit of calling round regularly once a week. Eventually he brought along his son Olivier, a tall, dry, skinny fellow of thirty who had married a tiny, slow-witted, sickly woman. Olivier had a job at the central police station at three thousand francs a month, something of which Camille was extremely jealous; he was a principal clerk in the Department of Public Order and Security. From the very first day Thérèse hated this stiff, cold man who considered that the arcade should be honoured to see his great lanky figure strutting down it, with the weakly form of his poor little wife by his side.

Camille brought along another guest, an old employee of the Orleans Railway. Grivet had served the company for twenty years; he was a senior clerk and earned two thousand one

hundred francs a month. It was he who decided who did what in the office where Camille worked, and Camille held him in a certain awe; he dreamed to himself that one day Grivet would die and he would perhaps come to replace him, after ten years or so. Grivet was delighted with the welcome Madame Raquin gave him, and came back each week with perfect regularity. Six months later his Thursday visit had become a duty; he went to the Passage du Pont-Neuf, in the same way as he went to his office each morning, out of pure animal instinct.

From then on, the Thursday gatherings were a real delight. At seven o'clock Madame Raquin would light the fire, stand the lamp in the middle of the table, place a box of dominoes next to it, and dust the tea service which stood on the sideboard. At exactly eight o'clock old Michaud and Grivet would meet up in front of the shop, the one coming from the Rue de Seine and the other from the Rue Mazarine. They would enter and everyone would go upstairs, sitting down round the table to wait for Olivier and his wife, who always arrived late. When the party was complete, Madame Raquin poured the tea, Camille tipped the dominoes out on to the waxed table-cloth and everyone became engrossed in the game. The clicking of dominoes was the only sound to be heard. After each game the players would argue for two or three minutes, then the dismal silence would descend again, interrupted only by more clicking.

Thérèse played with a lack of interest which Camille found irritating. She would sit with François, the fat tabby cat which Madame Raquin had brought from Vernon, in her lap, stroking him with one hand and laying down the dominoes with the other. Thursday evenings were a torture to her; often she would complain that she felt unwell, or had a bad migraine, so that she could avoid playing and sit there doing nothing, half asleep. With one elbow on the table, her cheek propped against the palm of her hand, she would look at the guests her aunt and her husband had invited, through the yellow, smoky fog given off by the lamp. All their ugly faces filled her with exasperation. She glanced from one to the other with deep disgust and sullen irritation. Old Michaud's face was pallid and covered with red blotches, the lifeless face of an old man in his dotage;

Grivet had the narrow features, round eyes, and pinched lips of a cretin; Olivier, whose bones seemed almost to stick through his cheeks, carried his stiff and insignificant head solemnly on top of a ridiculous body; as for Suzanne, Olivier's wife, her soft face was utterly blanched, with dull eyes and white lips. Among these grotesque, sinister creatures in whose company she was shut up, Thérèse could find not one real human being; at times she was overcome by the hallucination of being immured deep in a burial vault in the company of mechanical corpses, which nodded their heads and moved their arms and legs about whenever their strings were pulled. She could hardly breathe in the oppressive atmosphere of the dining-room, and the eerie silence and yellowish glow of the lamp filled her with a vague and unspeakable terror.

Down in the shop, a doorbell had been fitted which gave a high-pitched tinkle when customers came in. Thérèse listened out for this ringing and whenever she heard it she would rush downstairs, happy and relieved to escape from the dining-room. She always took her time serving the customer. Then, once she was alone, she would sit down behind the counter and stay there as long as possible, fearful of going back up, and thoroughly pleased at not having Grivet and Olivier in front of her any more. The damp air in the shop took away the feverish pricking sensation in her hands, and she lapsed back into her customary state of solemn abstraction.

But she could never remain there for long. Camille would grow angry at her absence, unable to understand how anyone could prefer the shop to the dining-room, and on a Thursday evening at that! He would lean over the banister, looking for his wife.

'Well,' he would shout, 'and what do you think you're doing down there? Why don't you come back up? . . . Grivet's having the luck of the devil tonight, he's just won again!'

The young woman would get reluctantly to her feet and go back to her place opposite old Michaud, whose drooping lips would twist into a repulsive smile. And until eleven o'clock she would stay slumped in her chair, holding François in her arms and staring down at him so as not to have to look at the cardboard dolls grimacing all around her.

V

ONE Thursday, when Camille came home from the office, he brought with him a tall, square-shouldered fellow whom he pushed through the door with a friendly shove.

'Mother', he asked Madame Raquin, pointing to him, 'do you recognize this gentleman?'

The old woman stared at the tall fellow, searched through her memory, and drew a blank. Thérèse looked on placidly throughout the whole scene.

'What!' continued Camille. 'You mean you don't recognize Laurent, little Laurent, the son of old Laurent who had such excellent fields of wheat, over Jeufosse way? ... Don't you remember? ... I used to go to school with him; he'd come round to fetch me every morning from his uncle's house nearby, and you always gave him bread and jam.'

Madame Raquin did suddenly remember little Laurent, though it seemed to her that he had grown rather a lot. It was a good twenty years since she had last seen him. She tried to make up for not having recognized him sooner with a flood of recollections and motherly endearments. Laurent had sat down, smiling gently, answering in a clear voice, and looking around him calmly, quite at his ease.

'Would you believe it,' said Camille; 'this character has been working at the Orleans station for the past eighteen months, and we only recognized each other for the first time this evening? It just goes to show what a big, important company it is!'

As he said this, the young man widened his eyes and pursed his lips, as proud as could be that he was a small cog in such a big machine. He went on, shaking his head:

'Of course, he's doing all right, he is, he's got qualifications; he's already getting fifteen hundred a month. His father sent him to college to do law, and he's even learned how to paint. That's right isn't it, Laurent? ... You'll stay to dinner, won't you?'

'All right,' replied Laurent, making no attempt to decline.

He put down his hat and made himself at home in the shop. Madame Raquin hurried off to look after things in the kitchen. Thérèse, who had not yet said a word, looked at the newcomer. She had never seen a real man before. Laurent, tall, strong, and fresh-faced, filled her with astonishment. She stared with a kind of wonder at the low forehead, from which sprung black bushy hair, the full cheeks, red lips, and regular features which made up his handsome, full-blooded face. Her gaze lingered for a while on his neck, which was broad and short, thick and powerful. Then she became lost in contemplation of the huge hands, which he kept spread across his knees as he sat there; their fingers were square and his clenched fist must be enormous, capable of felling an ox. Laurent was of true farming stock; he had a rather heavy, stooping gait, his movements were slow and careful, and his face wore a calm, stubborn expression. Beneath his clothes you could make out the well-developed, bulging muscles and the firm, solid flesh of his body. Thérèse looked him up and down with great curiosity, from his fists to his face, and a little shiver ran through her when her glance settled on his bull's neck.

Camille got out his volumes of Buffon and his penny instalments, to show his friend that he too was studying. Then, as if in reply to a question he had been asking himself for some time, he said to Laurent:

'By the way, you do know my wife, don't you? You remember my little cousin who used to play with us at Vernon?'

'Of course. I recognized Madame at once,' replied Laurent, looking Thérèse straight in the eye.

This direct gaze, which seemed to pierce her to the core, made the young woman feel almost unwell. She gave a forced smile and exchanged a few words with Laurent and her husband, before hurrying off to help her aunt. She was quite unsettled.

They sat down to eat. As soon as the soup was served, Camille thought he ought to make conversation with his friend.

'How's your father getting on?' he asked.

'I've no idea,' said Laurent. 'We've fallen out. We haven't written to each other in the last five years.'

'Well blow me down!' exclaimed the clerk, astonished that such monstrous things could happen.

'Yes indeed, the dear man has all sorts of odd ideas ... He's continually ending up in court with the neighbours, so he sent me away to college in the hope that I'd become a lawyer and win all his cases for him. Not one for frivolous ambitions, my old man; even his craziest ideas are calculated to bring him some advantage.'

'And you didn't want to be a lawyer?' said Camille, astonished.

'Certainly not!' continued his friend with a laugh. 'For two years I pretended to go to lectures so that I could keep drawing the twelve hundred francs allowance from my father. I was sharing a place with a college friend who is a painter, and I started painting too. I enjoyed it; it's good fun, not hard work at all. We used to smoke and lark about all day long ...'

The Raquin family's eyes widened in astonishment.

'Unfortunately,' continued Laurent, 'it was all too good to last. Dad found out that I'd been lying to him. He cut off my hundred francs a month at a stroke and invited me to go back and till the soil with him. I tried to get by, painting religious pictures, but there's no money in it. Once I realized that I was clearly going to die of hunger, I decided to chuck it in and look around for a job. The old man will pop off one of these days, and I'll just have to wait till then to live the idle life.'

Laurent spoke quite unemotionally. In a few words, he had just told a story which summed him up perfectly. He was basically lazy by temperament, with full-blooded appetites and a pronounced desire for easy and long-lasting pleasures. His great body asked for no more than to do nothing but lounge about all day long in idleness and contentment. He would have been happy just eating and sleeping well, and giving full rein to his passions, without having to lift a finger or risk tiring himself in any way.

The legal profession had filled him with horror, and he shuddered at the idea of tilling the soil. He had thrown himself into art in the hope of making an easy living; he found using a paintbrush light work, and he thought that success was easily

come by. He dreamed of a life of cheap delights, a splendid life full of women, with much lounging around on divans and orgies of food and drink. The dream continued as long as Laurent senior kept sending the money. But once the young man, who was already thirty, saw starvation looming on the horizon, he began to think seriously; he did not have the courage to face privation, and would never have gone a day without bread for the greater glory of art. So, as he said, he had chucked painting to the devil when he realized it would never satisfy his broad appetites. His first attempts had never even reached the level of mediocrity; with his farmer's eye, he had a clumsy and messy view of nature, and his canvases, muddy-looking, ill-composed, and grimacing, defied all critical appreciation. In any case, he was not particularly vain as an artist, and was not excessively depressed when he was forced to lay down his brushes. The only thing he really missed was his school friend's spacious studio, in which he had been able to laze about so enjoyably for four or five years. He also missed the women who used to come and model, whose favours were within the reach of his purse; the brutish pleasures he had discovered in this world had left him with compelling needs of the flesh. Still, he felt quite at home working as an office employee; he enjoyed the regular life, the daily round of drudgery, which did not tire him out physically but sent his mind to sleep. Only two things irritated him: there were no women, and the food in the eighteen sous restaurants did not satisfy his stomach's gluttonous cravings.

Camille listened, staring at him in doltish astonishment. This weakling, whose soft and puny body had never once felt a tremor of desire, began to picture in a childish way the studio life which his friend was telling him about. He imagined the women exhibiting their bare flesh; he questioned Laurent further.

'You mean', he said, 'there were women who actually took their clothes off, in front of you?

'Certainly,' replied Laurent with a smile, looking at Thérèse, who had turned very pale.

'That must make you feel rather ... funny,' continued Camille with a giggle. 'I'd have been all embarrassed ... The first time, I suppose you didn't know where to look.'

Laurent had spread out one of his great hands and was staring closely at the palm. His fingers trembled slightly and his cheeks flushed pink.

'The first time', he went on as if speaking to himself, 'I think I found it quite natural ... It's great fun, this whole art business, it's just that you can't make a penny at it ... I had one model, an adorable red-head, with firm white skin, superb breasts and hips as broad as ...'

Laurent looked up and saw Thérèse in front of him, silent and motionless. The young woman was looking at him with a fixed and burning gaze. Her eyes, dull black, were like two bottomless shafts, and between her half-open lips could be seen the pink highlights of her mouth. She was sitting hunched up and withdrawn, but she was listening.

The one-time painter looked across from Thérèse to Camille and had to hold back a smile. He completed his sentence with a rounded, voluptuous movement of the hand which Thérèse followed with her eyes. They had got round to dessert, and Madame Raquin had just gone down to serve a customer.

When the table-cloth was removed, Laurent, who had been lost in thought for some minutes, suddenly turned to Camille and said:

'You know, I really should paint your portrait.'

This idea delighted Madame Raquin and her son. Thérèse remained silent.

'It's summer now', continued Laurent, 'and since we get out of the office at four, I can come round here and have you sit for me for a couple of hours in the evening. A week's all it will take.'

'That's fine', said Camille, pink with pleasure, 'and you can stay for dinner! I'll have my hair curled, and put on my black coat.'

The clock struck eight. Grivet and Michaud made their entrance. Olivier and Suzanne arrived behind them.

Camille introduced his friend to the gathering. Grivet pursed his lips with disapproval. He disliked Laurent, because he considered that he had been promoted too quickly. In any case, bringing in a new face was not something to be undertaken lightly, and Madame Raquin's guests could not accept a stranger without a show of coldness.

Laurent was on his best behaviour. He understood the situation and did his utmost to please and gain acceptance straightaway. He told jokes, his loud laughter livened up the whole evening, and he even won the friendship of Grivet himself.

That evening Thérèse did not look for excuses to go down to the shop. She stayed in her seat until eleven, playing games and chatting and avoiding catching Laurent's eye; he in any case paid no attention to her. The man's full-blooded temperament, his powerful voice and rich laugh, and the bitter, pungent aroma given off by his whole person, disturbed the young woman and plunged her into a state of nervous anxiety.

VI

FROM that day on Laurent came round to see the Raquins almost every evening. He lived in the Rue Saint-Victor,* opposite the Port aux Vins, in a tiny furnished garret at eighteen francs a month; this room, with a skylight in the sloping ceiling which opened to reveal nothing but a narrow slit of sky, was scarcely six square metres in size. Laurent always went back to this hovel as late as possible. Before he had met Camille, as he did not have the money to go hanging around in cafés, he used to linger in the little eating place where he took his evening meal, smoking one pipe after another while he drank a rum coffee which cost three sous. Then he would make his way slowly back to the Rue Saint-Victor, strolling along the river and stopping to sit on benches when the weather was warm.

He came to regard the shop in the Passage du Pont-Neuf as a charming retreat, warm, peaceful, and full of pleasant chatter and friendly attentions. He saved the three sous from his rum coffee and enjoyed drinking Madame Raquin's excellent tea instead. There he would stay, dozing, letting his meal go down and feeling very much at home, until ten o'clock, and he would leave only after helping Camille to lock up the shop.

One evening he brought along his easel and box of paints, as he was planning to begin Camille's portrait the next day. A canvas was bought and minute preparations made. Finally the artist set to work in the couple's bedroom, where, as he said, the light was better.

It took him three evenings to draw the head. He dragged the charcoal laboriously across the canvas in small, inhibited strokes; his stiff, lifeless technique was a grotesque parody of the primitive masters. He copied Camille's features like a student drawing from the nude, with a hesitant hand and a clumsy accuracy which gave the face a sullen expression. On the fourth day he put some tiny blobs of colour onto his palette and

began to paint, using the very tips of his brushes; he applied the colour in messy dabs and short, closely hatched lines, rather as if he had been using a pencil.

At the end of each sitting Madame Raquin and Camille were always in ecstasies. Laurent said that they must wait, it would soon start to be more of a likeness.

Since work had begun on the portrait, Thérèse had been spending all her time in the bedroom-turned-studio. She left her aunt alone behind the counter and went upstairs on the slightest pretext to watch Laurent paint, oblivious of everything else.

As serious and subdued as ever, but even paler and more silent, she would sit down and follow the movement of the brushes. Not that she seemed to derive much enjoyment from watching; she came as if attracted by a strange force, and there she stayed, unable to tear herself away. Occasionally Laurent would turn round, smile at her, and ask whether she liked the portrait. She scarcely spoke in reply, but quivered and resumed her fascinated contemplation.

On his way back to the Rue Saint-Victor in the evening, Laurent's mind was full of debate as he argued with himself whether or not he should become Thérèse's lover.

'Now there's one little lady who will be my mistress whenever I like,' he said to himself. 'She's forever there at my back, examining me, taking my measure, weighing me up . . . She's always quivering and she has a funny expression, quiet but passionate. One thing's for sure, she needs a lover; you can see it in her eyes . . . And it must be said, Camille's a pretty poor substitute.'

Laurent laughed to himself at the memory of his friend's puny, pallid form. Then he went on:

'She's bored to death in that shop . . . I only go there because I've got nothing better to do. Otherwise, you wouldn't catch me anywhere near the Passage du Pont-Neuf! It's so damp and dismal. It must be death to a woman like her . . . She finds me attractive, I'm sure of that, so why not me rather than someone else?'

He kept halting as his mind filled with ridiculous imaginings, and stood watching the Seine flow by with a preoccupied air.

'May as well, and why not?!' he exclaimed; 'I'll give her a kiss at the first opportunity . . . I bet she'll fall straight into my arms!'

As he set off again, he was overcome once more by uncertainty.

'The thing is,' he thought to himself, 'she's really very plain; she's got a long nose and a big mouth. Anyway, I don't love her the slightest bit. And it could well get me into some unpleasantness. I'll have to think hard about it.'

Laurent, who was very prudent, turned these thoughts over in his mind for a whole week. He calculated everything that might happen if he started an affair with Thérèse, and only resolved to try it when he was certain in his own mind that he really had something to gain.

It is true that he found Thérèse plain and did not love her, but then she would not cost him anything; the women he usually picked up cheaply were certainly no prettier, nor any better loved. On grounds of economy alone, it was a good idea to take his friend's wife. Besides, it was a long time since he had last satisfied his appetites; when money was short he stinted the flesh, and he certainly did not want to miss an opportunity of indulging it a bit now. Then again, when he came to think about it, an affair like this could hardly lead to any trouble: it would be in Thérèse's interests to cover it up, and he could easily jilt her when he felt like it; even if Camille did find out and get annoyed, he would just thump him if he started to throw his weight around. Whichever way he looked at it, the prospect seemed an easy and alluring one to Laurent.

From then on he lived in a pleasantly confident frame of mind, waiting his moment. He had made up his mind to act directly, at the first opportunity. He foresaw cosy evenings ahead; all the Raquins would be working for his greater enjoyment, with Thérèse soothing his heated passions, Madame Raquin covering him in motherly attentions, and Camille chatting to him of an evening in the shop so that he would not get too bored.

The portrait was nearly finished and still no opportunity had presented itself. Thérèse was there all the time, anxious and subdued, but Camille never left the bedroom and Laurent began to despair of ever getting him out of the way for an hour or so. Eventually he was obliged to announce that the portrait would be finished the next day. Madame Raquin

declared that they would all dine together in celebration of the painter's work.

The following day, when Laurent had put the finishing touches to his canvas, the whole family gathered round to exclaim at the likeness. It was a vile portrait, dirty grey with great purplish blotches. Laurent was incapable of using any of the brighter colours without making them dull and muddy; he had unwittingly exaggerated the pallid skin-tones of his model, and Camille's face had the greenish hue of a drowned man; the features were twisted and contorted by the grimacing way in which they were drawn, which actually made the sinister resemblance even more striking. But Camille was delighted; he said that the picture had an air of distinction.

When he had finished admiring his own face, he declared that he was going to fetch two bottles of champagne. Madame Raquin went back down to the shop. The artist was left alone with Thérèse.

The young woman had remained crouching there, staring absently in front of her. She was quivering, and seemed to be waiting for something. Laurent hesitated; he examined the canvas, and played with his brushes. Time was slipping away, Camille might come back, there might never be another opportunity. Suddenly, the painter turned round and found himself face to face with Thérèse. They looked intently at each other for a few seconds.

Then in a violent movement Laurent bent down, took the young woman in his arms, and pressed her against his chest. He pushed her head back and crushed her lips beneath his own. She made one wild, instinctive attempt to fight him off, then suddenly her resistance ceased and she slid down on to the floor. They did not exchange a word. Their act was silent and brutal.

VII

FROM the beginning, the lovers felt their affair to be something necessary, inevitable, and utterly natural. At their first meeting they spoke familiarly and kissed without any blushing or embarrassment, as if their intimacy had already been going on for a number of years. They were quite calm and at ease in their new situation, and they lived completely without shame.

They worked out how they would meet. As Thérèse could not go out, it was decided that Laurent would come round to her. In a clear and confident voice she explained to him the arrangement she had thought up. They would see each other in the bedroom. Her lover would come up the side passage which led off the arcade, and she would let him in through the door at the top of the stairs. Meanwhile, Camille would be at his office and Madame Raquin downstairs in the shop. Such a bold plan could scarcely fail.

Laurent agreed. For all his prudence, he had a kind of animal daring, the daring of a man with huge fists. His mistress's calm, serious air was strong encouragement to come and taste of a passion so daringly offered. He picked an excuse, his boss gave him two hours off, and he hastened round to the Passage du Pont-Neuf.

As soon as he set foot in the arcade, he felt a strong tingle of anticipation. The woman who sold costume jewellery was sitting right opposite the door to the side passage. He had to wait until she was busy, selling a brass ring or some earrings to a young working woman. Then he slipped quickly into the passage and climbed the dark, narrow staircase, pressing against the damp, sticky walls. Every time he stumbled on one of the stone steps, the noise gave him a burning sensation in the chest. A door opened, and there on the threshold, dazzling in the white glow of the lamp, he saw Thérèse in her camisole and petticoat, her hair tied up tight in a bun. She shut the door and flung her arms round his neck; she had a warm scent of white linen and newly washed flesh.

Laurent was astonished at how beautiful he found his mistress. He had never before seen this woman as she really was. Thérèse, lithe and strong, hugged him and threw back her head, her face lit up by smiles in which passion burned. It was as if her features had been transfigured by love; her expression was wild but caressing, her lips moist and her eyes shining; she was radiant with joy. With her body wound sinuously around his, she was beautiful with the strange beauty of complete abandon. It was as if her face had been illuminated from within and flames were leaping from her flesh; and the fire in her blood and the tautness of her muscles filled the air around her with warm exhalations, bitter and penetrating.

From the first kiss, she showed an instinctive skill in the arts of love. Her hungry body threw itself into the experience of pleasure with total abandon. She was emerging from a dream and awakening to passion, and passing from the feeble arms of Camille into the muscular embrace of Laurent. This approach of a powerful man was like a sudden jolt which had shocked her body out of its slumber. All the instincts of a highly strung woman now burst to the fore with incomparable violence, as her mother's blood, that African blood which burned in her veins, began to pulse furiously through her slight, still almost virginal body. She offered herself to him with a total absence of shame, and she was racked from head to toe by long drawn-out spasms.

Laurent had never known a woman like this, and it disconcerted him, made him ill at ease. He did not normally receive such a passionate welcome from his mistresses; he was used to cold, indifferent kisses and tired, satiated love-making. Thérèse's moans and fits almost frightened him, while at the same time stimulating his sensual curiosity. When he left her he was tottering like a drunkard. The next day, once he had regained his caution and his rather forced composure, he asked himself whether or not to go back to this lover whose kisses so inflamed his passions. At first he firmly resolved to stay at home. Then he began to weaken. He wanted to forget Thérèse, the sight of her naked body and her sweet but brutal caresses, yet there she still was, implacable, holding her arms out to him. The physical pain which this vision caused him soon became unbearable.

He gave in, arranged another meeting, and returned to the Passage du Pont-Neuf.

From that day on Thérèse became a part of his life. He did not yet accept her, but bowed to her will. There were hours when he was filled with horror, and moments when all his caution came back, and all in all the affair was an unpleasant disruption; but his fears and misgivings always gave way before his desire. One assignation was followed by another, then many more.

Thérèse had no such doubts. She gave herself to him unsparingly, going straight where her passion led. This woman, who had been bowed down by circumstances and was finally standing up for herself, laid bare her whole being, and explained to him her past life.

Sometimes she would put her arms around Laurent's neck, pull herself up along his chest, and say to him in a voice still breathless with passion:

'Oh, if only you knew how much I have suffered! I was brought up in the clammy heat of a sick-room. I had to sleep next to Camille; at night I tried to move away from him to escape the disgusting stale smell of his body. He was tetchy and stubborn; he refused to take his medicines unless I shared them with him, so to please my aunt I had to drink all sorts of potions. I don't know how it didn't kill me . . . They have made me ugly, my poor darling, they've stolen everything I had, so you can never love me as much as I love you.'

She wept and she kissed Laurent, then went on with hatred smouldering in her voice:

'I don't wish them any harm. They brought me up, took me in and protected me from destitution . . . But I would have preferred abandonment to their hospitality. I had a desperate need for wide-open spaces; as a little girl, I dreamt of roaming barefoot along dusty roads, begging alms and living the life of a gypsy. I was told that my mother was the daughter of a tribal chief in Africa; I often thought of her, and how close I am to her in my blood and my instincts; I wished I had never had to leave her, and that she might still have been carrying me across the desert on her back . . . Ah! What a way to grow up! Thinking about the long days which I spent in that bedroom with Camille coughing and groaning still fills

me with disgust and anger. I used to squat in front of the fire, mindlessly watching his infusions boil and feeling my limbs grow stiff. I couldn't even move around; my aunt used to scold me whenever I made a noise . . . Later on I did have a taste of real joy, in the little house by the river, but by then I had already been too much repressed; I could hardly walk and I fell over whenever I tried to run. Then they buried me alive in this awful shop.'

Thérèse breathed heavily as she squeezed her lover in her arms; she was taking her revenge, and her delicate, supple nostrils quivered nervously.

'You wouldn't believe how vicious they've made me,' she went on. 'They've made me into a hypocrite and a liar . . . They so smothered me in their bourgeois comforts that I can't understand how there can still be blood in my veins . . . I looked down at the ground and put on the same dismal, stupid expression, and lived the same dead life, as them. When you first saw me, I looked just like some dumb animal, didn't I? Gloomy, cast down, all passive? I had no hope left, I was thinking of throwing myself in the Seine one day . . . But before I reached that state of dejection, how many nights of rage I spent! Back in my cold room in Vernon, I used to bite my pillow to stifle my shouts, and hit myself and call myself a coward; my blood was on fire and I could almost have torn my body to pieces with rage. Twice I wanted to run away and just keep going, out into the sunshine, but my courage failed me; they had turned me into a docile pet with their flabby benevolence and revolting affection. So I lied and kept on lying; I stayed put, all sweetness and silence, when I really wanted to hit out and bite back.'

The young woman stopped, wiping her moist lips on Laurent's neck. After a moment's silence, she added:

'I don't know any more why I agreed to marry Camille. I didn't protest, out of a sort of disdainful indifference. I took pity on the poor child. When I used to play with him, I felt my fingers sinking into his limbs as if they were made of clay. I took him because my aunt offered him to me, and because I had no intention of putting myself out for him. And in my husband I found that same poorly little boy next to whom I'd already had to sleep from the age of six. He was just as

frail and complaining, and he had the same stale, sickly smell which had so nauseated me all those years ago ... I'm telling you all this so that you won't be jealous ... I felt a kind of disgust rising in my throat; I remembered all the potions I had drunk, and I moved away from him; I had some dreadful nights. But you, you ...'

And Thérèse lifted her upper body, arching her back, with her fingers caught in Laurent's strong hands, looking down at his broad shoulders and enormous neck.

'I love *you*, I have done since the day Camille first pushed you into the shop. You may not respect me, because I gave myself to you all at once, everything ... Truly, I don't know how it happened. I am proud, I'm impetuous too, and I felt like hitting you that first day, when you kissed me and threw me to the floor here in this bedroom ... I don't know how I can have loved you; actually, it was more like hate. The sight of you irritated me, I couldn't stand it; when you were there, my nerves were stretched to breaking-point, my mind went blank, and I saw red. Oh, how I suffered! Yet I wanted my suffering and longed for you to come; as I moved round and round your chair I sensed your breath on my body and felt my clothes brush against yours. It was as if your blood were radiating warmth as I passed, and it was this burning aura surrounding you that attracted me and held me close to you, despite my inner urge to rebel ... You remember when you were doing the painting here? An irresistible force attracted me to your side, made me breathe in your atmosphere with painful delight. I realized that I seemed to be begging for kisses and I was ashamed to be so enslaved; I knew I should fall if you only touched me. But I gave in to my weakness, shivering with cold while I waited for you to deign to take me in your arms.'

Then Thérèse fell silent, still quivering, proud and avenged. She held Laurent, drunk with passion, to her breast, and in that bare and freezing bedroom there were enacted scenes of fiery passion, sinister and brutish. Each new meeting brought still more violent ecstasies.

The young woman seemed to thrive on her daring and impudent behaviour. She never hesitated or showed any fear. She threw herself into adultery with a sort of frantic energy, facing

danger with alacrity and taking pride in doing so. Whenever her lover was due to come round, her only precaution was to warn her aunt that she was going upstairs for a rest; while he was there, she would walk about, talk, and do everything with no attempt at concealment, without ever worrying about making a noise. Sometimes, in the early days, this scared Laurent.

'For heaven's sake,' he would whisper to Thérèse, 'don't make such a racket; Madame Raquin will be coming up.'

'It's all right!' she laughed. 'You are a real worrier. She's stuck behind her counter; what do you think she'd come up here for? She'd be too afraid of the till being robbed . . . Anyway, let her come up if she wants to. You can always hide. I don't give a damn about her. I love you.'

Laurent was scarcely reassured by her words. His sneaking peasant's caution had not been entirely stifled by passion. Soon, however, by force of habit, he came to accept without undue terror the difficulties of these assignations in broad daylight, in Camille's own bedroom, only feet from the old haberdasher. His mistress kept explaining to him that danger spares the bold, and she was right. The lovers could not have found a safer place than this room where nobody would ever come looking for them. Incredibly, they were able to satisfy their desires there quite undisturbed.

One day, however, Madame Raquin did come up, fearing that her niece might be ill. The young woman had been upstairs for nearly three hours, and she had now taken her daring to the point of not even bolting the door between the bedroom and the dining-room.

When Laurent heard the old woman's heavy tread coming up the wooden stairs, he snatched up his waistcoat and hat in a panic. Thérèse began to laugh at his peculiar expression. She grabbed him forcefully by the arm, made him bend down at the head of the bed, in a corner, and said to him in a quiet, self-possessed voice:

'Stay there . . . don't move.'

She threw on top of him all the men's clothes that were lying about, and over the whole pile she spread a white petticoat which she had taken off. She did all this with swift, accurate movements, without becoming at all flustered. Then she lay

down, her hair in disorder, half naked, still flushed and quivering from their embrace.

Madame Raquin opened the door quietly and crept on tiptoe towards the bed. Thérèse pretended to be asleep. Laurent was sweating beneath the petticoat.

'Thérèse, my dear,' asked the haberdasher with concern, 'aren't you feeling well?'

Thérèse opened her eyes, yawned, turned over, and replied in plaintive tones that she had a terrible headache. She begged her aunt to let her go back to sleep. The old woman went away just as she had come, without making any noise.

Silently laughing, the two lovers kissed each other with violence and passion.

'You see,' said Thérèse triumphantly; 'we have nothing to fear here. All these people are blind, they aren't in love.'

Another day, the young woman had an odd idea. She could behave at times as if she were quite crazy, her mind wandering.

François the tabby cat was sitting upright in the middle of the room. Solemn and motionless, he stared at the two lovers with his big round eyes. He seemed to be scrutinizing them unblinkingly, lost in some devilish reverie.

'Just look at François,' said Thérèse to Laurent. 'He looks as if he understands what's going on, and he's going to tell Camille all about it this evening ... Wouldn't it be funny if he suddenly started to talk in the shop one of these days? He'd have some fine tales to tell about us.'

Thérèse found the idea of François starting to speak extremely amusing. Laurent looked at the cat's big green eyes and felt a shiver run down his spine.

'Here's what he'd do,' Thérèse went on. 'He'd stand up, point at you with one paw and me with the other, and shout out: "Monsieur and Madame get up to all sorts of naughty things together in the bedroom; they take no notice of me, but since their illicit affair makes me sick, please put them both in prison so they won't disturb my nap in future."'

Thérèse joked about like a child, imitating the cat by stretching out her fingers into claws and rolling her shoulders in feline undulations. François, still sitting perfectly still, watched her all the time; only his eyes seemed to be alive, while two deep

wrinkles at the corners of his mouth put a laughing expression on his stuffed-animal face.

Laurent felt a chill in his bones. He thought Thérèse's fooling around was ridiculous. He stood up and put the cat out of the door. The truth was that he was afraid. His mistress had not yet taken him over altogether; deep down there still lingered a little of the unease he had felt when Thérèse had first kissed him.

VIII

In the shop, of an evening, Laurent was utterly happy. He generally came back from the office with Camille. Madame Raquin had taken a maternal liking to him; she knew he was penniless, that he did not eat well and slept in an attic, and she had told him once and for all that there would always be a place for him at their table. She felt the same garrulous affection for him which many old women have for people from the same part of the world as themselves, who bring with them memories of the past.

The young man availed himself freely of their hospitality. After the office, before going home, he would take a little turn along the river with Camille; this intimacy suited them both as a way of avoiding boredom, for they chatted as they strolled along. Then they would decide to go home and eat the meal Madame Raquin had prepared. Laurent would open the door of the shop as if he owned the place, sitting on the chairs back to front, smoking and spitting, as if he were in his own home.

He was not in the least put out by the presence of Thérèse. He behaved towards her in an open, friendly manner, making jokes and addressing perfectly ordinary pleasantries to her without his expression giving anything away. Camille would laugh, and, since his wife only responded to his friend in monosyllables, he was firmly of the belief that they could not stand each other. One day he even reproached Thérèse for what he called her coldness towards Laurent.

Laurent had really struck gold: he had become the wife's lover, the husband's friend, and the mother's spoilt child, all at once. He had never before experienced such complete satisfaction of his appetites. He basked in the infinite gratification provided by the Raquin family. Moreover, he found his position among them quite natural. He spoke familiarly to Camille, with neither anger nor remorse in his voice. So sure was he of his own caution and self-control that he did not

even watch his words and actions; the single-mindedness with which he revelled in his good fortune protected him from mistakes. In the shop his mistress became a woman like any other, whom he must not kiss or find attractive. The only thing that prevented him from kissing her in front of everyone else was his fear of being told not to come back. Otherwise, he could not have cared less about how it would hurt Camille and his mother. The consequences that the discovery of their affair might bring never entered his head. He regarded himself simply as behaving like a poor man without enough to eat, as anyone else might have done in his place. Hence his unthinking complacency, his cautious daring, his detached and ironic attitude.

Thérèse, more nervous and highly-strung than he, was compelled to act out her role. She did it to perfection, thanks to the skill in hypocrisy which her upbringing had given her. For close on fifteen years she had lived a lie, stifling her passionate impulses and bending her implacable will to the task of appearing dull and passive. Now it cost her but little to adopt a chill, lifeless mask which froze her features. Whenever Laurent entered he found her wearing a serious, reserved expression which made her nose seem longer and her lips thinner. She was ugly, bad-tempered, and unapproachable. Nor did she overdo things, but simply played her old character, without any sudden change which might awaken suspicion. She took a keen pleasure in deceiving Camille and Madame Raquin; she was not like Laurent, simply wallowing in the satisfaction of his fleshly desires, with no thought of right and wrong; she knew what harm she was doing, and she was seized by fierce urges to get up from the table and kiss Laurent full on the mouth, just to show her husband and aunt that she was not some tame lap-dog, but had a lover.

At times, a warm flush of joy went to her head; then, however good an actress she might be, she could not stop herself from singing, as long as her lover was not there and she had no fear of betraying him. Madame Raquin was delighted with these sudden outbursts of gaiety, for she normally reproached her niece for being too serious. The young woman bought pots of flowers to put in the bedroom window; then she had new wallpaper put up, and wanted a carpet, curtains, rosewood furniture. All this luxury was for Laurent.

Nature and circumstance seemed to have made the two of them for each other, and pushed them together. This nervous, insincere woman and this man of full-blooded temperament and animal instincts made up a powerfully bonded couple. They complemented each other and were mutually protective. In the evening, as they sat at the table in the pale lamplight, the strength of their union could be seen in the solid, smiling face of Laurent opposite the mute, impenetrable mask of Thérèse.

These were quiet, pleasant evenings. Friendly words broke the silence in the warm, transparent shadows. They squeezed closer together around the table after dessert and chatted about the hundred little details of the day, with recollections of the day before and plans for the morrow. Camille liked Laurent as much as he could like anyone, in his smug, egotistical way, and Laurent seemed to return his affection; they exchanged protestations of loyalty, kindly gestures, and considerate glances. Madame Raquin, with her placid expression, spread her own peace of mind around her children, in the calm air they breathed. It was like a meeting of very old friends who knew each other's every feeling and had complete trust in the strength of their friendship.

Thérèse, calm and unmoving like the others, looked on at their complacent relaxation, their bourgeois pleasures, and deep down she was filled with savage laughter; her whole being jeered at them while her face retained its cold rigidity. She reminded herself with exquisite delight that only a few hours earlier she had been in the bedroom next door, half naked, her hair undone, lying on Laurent's chest; she recalled every detail of their afternoon of mad passion, running over each one in her memory and comparing that earlier steamy scene with the deathly picture which she now had before her eyes. Oh! how she was deceiving these good people, and how happy she was to deceive them in such a triumphant and insolent way! It was there, only a few feet away, behind a flimsy partition, that she regularly entertained a man, wallowing in the bitter-sweet pleasures of adultery. But for now, her lover had to be a person whom she no longer knew, her husband's friend, a kind of foolish interloper of whom she had no need to take any notice. This dreadful play-acting, this life of deception,

the comparison between the burning embraces of the day and the pretended indifference of the evening, sent the blood coursing through her veins with a new ardour.

Whenever Madame Raquin and Camille happened to go downstairs, Thérèse would leap up and silently, but with brutal energy, crush her lips against those of her lover, staying in that position, panting and hardly able to breathe, until she heard the wooden stairs creak again. Then she would slip quickly back to her place and put on her sullen frown, while Laurent calmly took up his chit-chat with Camille where they had left off. It was like a lightning flash of passion, quick and blinding, in a deadened sky.

Thursday evenings were a little more lively. Laurent, bored to death by the proceedings, nevertheless made it his duty not to miss a single one; as a precaution, he wanted to be known and respected by Camille's friends. He had to sit and listen to the ramblings of Grivet and old Michaud. Michaud always told the same old stories of murder and theft, while Grivet talked about his subordinates and his superiors and his department, all mixed up together. The young man took refuge in the company of Olivier and Suzanne, who seemed less overwhelmingly stupid; he was also quick to call for a game of dominoes.

It was on Thursday evenings that Thérèse would fix the day and the time of their assignations. In the confusion as the guests left, while Madame Raquin and Camille were showing them out by the door into the arcade, she would go up to Laurent, whisper to him, and squeeze his hand. Sometimes, when everyone's back was turned, she would even kiss him, out of bravado.

This life of alternating tension and release lasted for eight months. The lovers lived in utter contentment; Thérèse no longer felt boredom or longing, while Laurent, satiated, cosseted, and looking even better fed, feared only one thing: that this delightful existence might one day come to an end.

IX

ONE afternoon, as Laurent was about to leave the office to go running into the waiting arms of Thérèse, his boss sent for him and told him firmly that in future he was forbidden to take time off. He had taken unfair advantage, and now the administration had resolved to dismiss him if he left his post one more time.

He sat there in desperation until the evening. He had to earn a living, he could not risk the sack. That evening the look of annoyance on Thérèse's face was a torture to him. He did not know how to explain to his mistress why he had gone back on his word. While Camille was shutting up the shop, he went quickly over to her:

'We can't see each other any more,' he whispered; 'my boss has refused to let me have any more time off.'

Camille was coming back. Laurent had to go without giving any more details, leaving Thérèse to face the shock of this brusque declaration. Frustrated, and refusing to accept that her pleasure could be disturbed in this way, she spent a sleepless night turning unlikely plans for assignations over in her mind. The following Thursday she spoke to Laurent for a minute at the most. Their anxiety was all the greater as they had nowhere to meet to talk things over and decide what to do. Thérèse arranged another time with her lover, but once more he failed to turn up. From then on she was obsessed with a single idea: to see him at all costs.

For a fortnight Laurent had been unable to get near Thérèse. He now realized how badly he needed her; the regular satisfaction of his desires had given him sharp, imperative new appetites. He no longer felt the least unease when embracing his mistress, but sought her embrace with the obstinacy of a starving animal. A surging passion had been building up in his body, and, now that his lover had been taken away from him, this passion burst out in blind rage; he was in love to the point of fury. Everything about his flourishing animal make-up

seemed to be unconscious; he obeyed his instincts and allowed himself to be dictated to by the will of his organism. A year earlier he would have greeted with scathing laughter any suggestion that he would ever be enslaved by a woman to the point where his whole peace of mind was undermined. But, unbeknown to him, desire had worked away deep inside him until it had finally delivered him, bound hand and foot, into the wild embrace of Thérèse. Now he was afraid he would cast prudence aside altogether, and did not dare go to the Passage du Pont-Neuf of an evening for fear of committing some act of folly. He was no longer in control of his actions; his mistress, with her cat-like suppleness and nervous sensitivity, had slowly insinuated herself into every fibre of his body. He needed this woman to live, as one needs food and drink.

He would certainly have done something stupid if he had not received a letter from Thérèse telling him to stay in the next evening; she promised to come and see him around eight o'clock.

As he left the office he got rid of Camille by saying that he was tired and wanted to go straight to bed. Thérèse, after dinner, also acted out her role; she mentioned a customer who had moved without paying her bill, played the determined creditor, and declared that she was going to demand her money. The customer lived in the Batignolles district.* Madame Raquin and Camille thought this was a long way to go and doubted whether she would succeed, but they were not overly surprised and let her set off without suspecting anything.

She ran to the Port aux Vins, slipping on the greasy cobbles and bumping into passers-by in her haste to get there. Her face became beaded with sweat, her hands were burning, and she felt drunk. She ran quickly up the lodging-house stairs. On the sixth floor, quite out of breath and with her eyes swimming, she saw Laurent leaning over the bannister, waiting for her.

She went into his attic room, which was so cramped that there was hardly space for her wide skirts. She tore off her hat with one hand and leaned against the bed in a faint . . .

The wide-open skylight brought a flood of cool evening air down on to the burning hot bed. The lovers stayed for a long

time in this garret, as though buried deep in a cave. Suddenly, Thérèse heard the clock of the Pitié hospital* strike ten. She wished she did not have to listen to it; she stood up unwillingly and, for the first time, looked round the room. Then she found her hat, tied the ribbons, and sat down, saying slowly:

'I have to go now.'

Laurent had come to kneel down in front of her. He took her hands in his.

'See you again one day,' she went on, without moving.

'Not just one day,' he exclaimed; 'that's too uncertain. Which day will you come back?'

She looked him in the eye.

'Do you want me to tell you the truth?' she said. 'Well then, the truth is, I don't think I ever will come back. I've got no more excuses, and I can't invent any.'

'So, it's farewell, then?'

'No! I won't let it be!'

She spoke these words in an angry and horrified voice. Then she added more quietly, not knowing what she was saying and without moving from her chair:

'I'm going to go now.'

Laurent was deep in thought. He was thinking about Camille.

'I've got nothing against him,' he said eventually, without speaking his name. 'But he really is starting to be too much of a nuisance ... Couldn't you get rid of him somehow, send him off on a journey, anywhere, a long way away?'

'Oh sure!' Thérèse nodded ironically. 'You really think he's the sort to go on a long journey? There's only one journey you don't come back from. But he'll see us all in the grave first. People like him spend their lives at death's door without actually dying.'

There was a moment's silence. Laurent shuffled closer on his knees, hugging his mistress to him, his head resting on her bosom.

'I had a dream,' he said; 'I wanted to spend a whole night with you, fall asleep in your arms and wake up the next morning to feel your kisses ... I want to be your husband ... Do you understand?'

'Oh yes!' replied Thérèse with a shudder.

And she suddenly bent over Laurent's face and covered it in kisses. Her hat-strings caught on the young man's rough beard; she had forgotten that she was fully dressed and that her clothes would be creased. She was sobbing, and she panted as she repeated through her tears:

'Don't say such things, or I'll stay here and never have the strength to leave you! Give me courage instead, tell me that we will see each other again ... You need me, don't you, and some day we will find a way of living together?'

'So come back, come back tomorrow,' replied Laurent, running his shaking hands up her body.

'But I can't ... I've told you, I haven't got an excuse!'

She was wringing her hands. She went on:

'Oh, I'm not afraid of the scandal; if you like, when I get home I'll tell Camille that you are my lover and I'll come back here for the night. It's you I'm afraid for; I don't want to ruin your life, I just want to make you happy.'

The young man's instinct for prudence was reawakened.

'You are right,' he said; 'we mustn't act like children. Oh! if only your husband were to die!'

'If my husband were to die ...' Thérèse repeated slowly.

'We could get married, we'd have nothing more to fear, we could enjoy each other to the full ... What a lovely, pleasant life it would be!'

The young woman leapt to her feet. Her cheeks went pale, she stared at her lover with a sombre look in her eye, and her lips began to twitch.

'People do sometimes die,' she murmured eventually. 'Only, it's dangerous for those who are left behind.'

Laurent made no reply.

'The thing is,' she went on, 'none of the well-known methods is any good.'

'That's not what I meant,' he said. 'I'm no fool, I want to love you in peace and quiet. I was just thinking that accidents happen every day; it's easy for a foot to slip or a tile to slide off a roof ... See what I mean? If that happens, only the wind is to blame.'

His voice sounded strange. He smiled, then added caressingly:

'Now don't you worry, we shall love each other all right, and live happily ... Since you can't come to me, I'll sort it

all out. If we have to go for months without seeing each other, don't forget me, remember that I'm working away for our happiness.'

He caught Thérèse up in his arms as she was opening the door to leave.

'You are all mine, aren't you?' he went on. 'Swear that you'll give yourself to me, completely, whenever I want.'

'Yes,' she exclaimed, 'I belong to you, do with me what you will.'

They stayed there for a moment, defiant and silent. Then Thérèse tore herself away and, without looking back, ran out of the room and down the stairs. Laurent listened as the sound of her footsteps grew fainter.

When he could no longer hear anything, he went back in and lay down. The sheets were warm. He felt stifled in this pit that Thérèse had left full of the heat of her passion. It was as if he were still breathing something of her presence; she had been there, filling the room with her penetrating scent of violets, and now his arms could embrace nothing more than the intangible ghost of his mistress which hovered all around him. He was smitten with renewed and unsatisfied desire. He left the window open. Lying on his back, with bare arms and open hands, hoping for some cool air, he began to think things over, staring at the dark blue square of sky framed by the skylight.

Until daybreak the same idea went round and round in his head. Before Thérèse had come he had not had any thought of murdering Camille; then, under the pressure of events and in exasperation at the thought that he would not see his lover ever again, he had talked of his death. Thus a new corner of his unconscious nature had revealed itself: carried away by his adultery, he had started dreaming of murder.

Now, in a calmer frame of mind and alone in the peaceful night, he studied the problem of murder; the idea of death, first uttered in despair between two kisses, kept returning with piercing and implacable clarity. Laurent, constantly jolted by insomnia and set on edge by the musky scent which Thérèse had left behind, laid traps in his mind, calculated the risk of things going wrong, and went over the advantages that becoming a murderer would bring.

In every way it was definitely in his interests to contemplate

committing the crime. He told himself that his father, the farmer from Jeufosse, was going to hang on for ever; he might have to stay an office clerk for another ten years, taking his meals in cheap eating houses and living in a garret, with no wife of his own. The prospect filled him with immense frustration. With Camille dead, on the other hand, he'd marry Thérèse, inherit Madame Raquin's money, resign from his job, and be free to stroll about in the sunshine. Thereupon, he began to dream of the lazy life he would lead, doing nothing but eating, sleeping, and waiting patiently for his father to die. And when reality reared its head in the middle of his dream, the obstacle was always Camille; he clenched his fists as though to strike him down.

Laurent wanted Thérèse; he wanted her to be entirely his own and always close at hand. If he did not get rid of the husband, the wife would elude him. As she had said, she could not come back to see him. He might easily have kidnapped her and taken her off somewhere, but then they would both have starved to death. There was less risk in killing the husband; it would not create a scandal, he would just be pushing one man out of the way and taking his place. With his brutal peasant's logic he found this an excellent and natural expedient. In fact, even his innate prudence encouraged him to take the quick way out.

He lay sprawled on his bed, in a sweat, his damp face buried in the pillow where Thérèse's hair had lain. He took the material repeatedly between his parched lips, drinking in the delicate perfumes it contained, and lay there breathless and gasping for air, while bands of flame flickered across his closed eyelids, wondering how on earth he could kill Camille. Then, when he had no breath left, he would turn over in one bound on to his back and, his eyes wide open and with the cold draught from the window playing full on his face, would search among the stars in the bluish square of sky for some advice on how to kill, some plan of murder.

No ideas came to him. As he had said to his mistress, he was not a child, or a fool; he wanted nothing to do with daggers or poison. What he needed was some underhand method, to be employed without danger, a sort of sinister suffocation with no cries or terror, where the victim simply disappeared. How-

ever strongly he was pushed on and encouraged by his passion, his whole being called imperiously for caution. He was too cowardly, too much of a sensualist, to put his quiet life at risk. He was going to kill, but only in order to live a happy, peaceful existence.

Gradually he was overtaken by sleep. The cold air had chased away from the attic the warm, scented ghost of Thérèse. Laurent, worn out but calmer, felt himself succumbing to a vague, pleasant feeling of numbness. As he was nodding off he made up his mind to wait for a favourable opportunity, and then, with consciousness slipping away, he was lulled by the murmuring thought: 'I'll kill him, I'll kill him.' Five minutes later he was asleep, his breathing serene and regular.

Thérèse had reached home at around eleven, quite unaware of how she had got back to the Passage du Pont-Neuf, for her head was on fire and her mind racing. Her ears were still so full of the things she had heard that she felt as if she had only just come down from Laurent's room. She found Madame Raquin and Camille anxious and concerned; she gave curt replies to their questions, saying that it had been a wasted errand and that she had stood for an hour on the pavement waiting for an omnibus.

When she climbed into bed, the sheets felt cold and clammy. Her limbs, still burning, shivered with repugnance. Camille soon went off to sleep, and for a long time Thérèse looked at his pasty face resting stupidly on the pillow, his mouth open. Then she drew away from him, feeling a sudden urge to thrust her clenched fist into his mouth.

X

NEARLY three weeks passed. Laurent went back to the shop each evening; he looked tired and unwell, there were slight bluish circles around his eyes, and his lips had become pale and cracked. Otherwise, he still had the same heavy calm about him, continuing to look Camille in the eye and behaving towards him in the same open, friendly way. Madame Raquin had begun to make an even greater fuss of this friend of the family since she had seen him sinking into a sort of dull fever.

Thérèse had resumed her usual dumb, sullen expression, and was more unmoving, inscrutable, and impassive than ever. It was as if for her Laurent did not exist; she scarcely gave him a glance, spoke to him only occasionally, and treated him with complete indifference. Madame Raquin, whose kind heart was offended by this attitude, sometimes said to the young man: 'Take no notice of my niece's coolness. I know her; her face seems cold, but her heart is warm, full of affection and devotion.'

The two lovers had no more assignations; since that night in the Rue Saint-Victor they had had no time alone together. Whenever they found themselves face to face of an evening and behaved with feigned indifference, like strangers, there were storms of passion, horror, and desire raging beneath the surface tranquillity of their faces. Thérèse went through bouts of anger, fits of cowardice and sarcasm; Laurent's mind was full of dark and brutal thoughts, and agonizing indecision. Neither dared examine the depths of his or her own being, and a disturbing fever filled their brains with a kind of dense, acrid vapour.

Whenever they could, behind a door, without speaking, they would clasp each other's hands almost to breaking-point in a rough and short-lived embrace, as if they wanted to tear strips from each other's flesh with their fingers. This was the only way they had of appeasing their desire; they put their whole bodies into it, and asked each other for nothing more. They were waiting.

One Thursday evening, before they settled down to a game of dominoes, Madame Raquin's guests were having their usual little chat. One of the great topics of conversation was always old Michaud's career in the police, and the strange and sinister adventures in which they supposed he had been involved. Grivet and Camille would listen open-mouthed to the ex-superintendent's stories, with the terrified expressions of little children listening to tales of *Bluebeard* or *Tom Thumb*. They found them frightening and entertaining at the same time.

That particular evening Michaud had just been relating a horrible murder, with details which had sent a shiver down his audience's spine, when he added with a shake of his head:

'But we don't know the half of it . . . How many crimes remain undiscovered! How many murderers escape human justice!'

'What!' exclaimed Grivet in astonishment. 'You mean, out there, in the street, there are still murdererous swines walking about who haven't been arrested?'

Olivier smiled disdainfully.

'My dear sir,' he replied in a crushing voice, 'if they haven't been arrested, it's because nobody knows they are murderers.'

His reasoning did not seem to convince Grivet. Camille came to his aid.

'For my part, I think the same as Monsieur Grivet,' he said pompously. 'I like to believe that the police are doing a good job, and that I will never have to rub shoulders with a murderer as I walk along the pavement.'

Olivier took his words as a personal afront.

'Of course the police are doing a good job,' he exclaimed with annoyance. 'But we can't do the impossible. There are some real villains around who learn their trade from the devil himself, and they would escape even from God. Isn't that so, father?'

'Yes indeed,' agreed old Michaud. 'For example, when I was at Vernon—perhaps you'll remember this, Madame Raquin—a wagoner was done in on the main road. The body was found hacked to pieces at the bottom of a ditch. The guilty party was never caught. He may still be alive today; perhaps he's a neighbour of ours, and perhaps Monsieur Grivet will bump into him on his way home.'

Grivet went as white as a sheet, scared to look round for fear that the wagoner's murderer was standing behind him. But in fact, he was quite enjoying his fright.

'No, really, no,' he stammered, not knowing what he was saying, 'no, I can't believe all that. I know another story: once upon a time a servant girl was sent to prison for stealing some of her employer's silver. Two months later, as they were felling a tree, they found the cutlery in a magpie's nest. The thief was this magpie. The girl was released. So you see,' he ended triumphantly, 'the guilty do always get their just deserts after all.'

Olivier sneered. 'So I suppose', he said, 'they locked up the magpie?'

'That's not what Monsieur Grivet meant,' said Camille, annoyed at seeing his superior made fun of. 'Mother, let's have the dominoes . . . '

While Madame Raquin went off to fetch the box, the young man went on, addressing himself to Michaud:

'So you admit, do you, that the police are powerless, and that there are still murderers walking around in broad daylight?'

'I'm afraid so, unfortunately,' replied Michaud.

'It isn't right!' concluded Grivet.

During this conversation Thérèse and Laurent had remained silent, not even smiling at Grivet's foolish tale. They sat with their elbows on the table, slightly pale-faced and with a distant look in their eyes, both listening intently. Just for a moment their eyes met, dark and burning. Little beads of sweat began to form at the roots of Thérèse's hair, and a chill draught sent an imperceptible shiver across Laurent's skin.

XI

SOMETIMES on Sundays, when the weather was fine, Camille would make Thérèse go out with him for a stroll along the Champs-Elysées. She would always have preferred to stay in the dank and gloomy atmosphere of the shop; she quickly grew tired and bored of trailing along the pavements on her husband's arm, stopping outside shops and having to listen to his imbecilic comments and exclamations of surprise, or put up with his stupid silence. But Camille would not hear of it; he enjoyed showing off his wife, and whenever he met one of his colleagues, and especially one of his superiors, he was full of pride at being able to exchange salutations in the company of Madame. Apart from that, he walked simply for walking's sake, almost without uttering a word, stiff and unnatural in his Sunday best, loitering along with a doltish, self-important expression on his face. For Thérèse, it was a real trial to be arm in arm with such a man.

On such outing days Madame Raquin would accompany her children as far as the end of the arcade, before kissing them goodbye as if they were setting off on a long journey, with endless advice and urgent pleas for care:

'Whatever you do, beware of accidents,' she would say to them. 'There is so much traffic here in Paris! Do promise me you won't go near the crowds.'

Eventually she would allow them to start on their way, watching them for a long time before going back into the shop. The heaviness in her legs prevented her from walking any great distance.

On other, less frequent occasions the couple would go outside Paris, to Saint-Ouen or Asnières,* where they would eat a fried lunch in one of the riverside restaurants. These were rare and festive outings which were discussed a good month in advance. Thérèse was much happier, almost joyful even, about such expeditions, which kept her out in the open air until ten or eleven at night. Saint-Ouen and its green islands

reminded her of Vernon; when she was there, all the wild affection she had felt for the Seine as a young girl was reawakened within her. She would sit on the gravel and dip her hands in the water, feeling herself coming alive in the hot sunshine, tempered by a cool, shady breeze. While she would happily sit on stones or muddy earth, not caring if her dress got dirty or torn, Camille would carefully unfold his handkerchief and squat down beside her with infinite care. Lately, the young couple had almost invariably invited Laurent along with them, and he livened up their walks with his laughter and peasant's vitality.

One Sunday, Camille, Thérèse, and Laurent set out for Saint-Ouen at about eleven, after breakfast. This outing, which had been planned for a long time, was to be the last one of the season. Autumn was coming and chill winds were already starting to send a shiver through the air in the evenings.

That morning, the sky was still as serene and blue as ever, and it was hot in the sun and warm in the shade. They decided that they must take advantage of the last rays of summer.

The three trippers climbed into a cab, accompanied by effusions of anxiety and regret from the old haberdasher. They crossed Paris and left the cab by the fortifications,* then took the road to Saint-Ouen on foot. It was noon. In the brilliant sunlight the dusty road had the blinding whiteness of snow. The air was scorching hot, heavy and acrid. Thérèse dallied along on Camille's arm, hiding beneath her sunshade, while her husband fanned his face with a voluminous handkerchief. Laurent came along behind them, with the sun burning down on the back of his neck, although he did not seem to notice; he whistled and kicked stones, and from time to time a wild expression came into his eyes as he stared at his mistress's swaying hips.

As soon as they arrived in Saint-Ouen, they began to look for a clump of trees with a carpet of shady green grass. They crossed on to an island and plunged into a thicket. A reddish layer of fallen leaves covered the ground, rustling and crackling underfoot. The innumerable tree trunks went straight up, like clusters of Gothic columns, and the branches came down to head-height, so that the strollers' horizon was hemmed in by a copper-coloured vault of dying leaves, and the black and

white shafts of the oaks and aspens. In this wild, remote place they found a small, deserted clearing, a melancholy retreat where everything was cool and quiet. All around them they could hear the rumbling of the Seine.

Laurent picked a dry spot, lifted the tails of his coat, and sat down. Thérèse flung herself down among the leaves in a great rustling of skirts; she was half buried in the folds of her dress, which had ridden up around her, laying one leg bare to the knee. Laurent, lying on his front with his chin on the ground, contemplated this leg while listening to his friend attacking the government for not turning all the little islands in the Seine into parks, with benches, gravelled walks, and well-pruned trees, as in the Tuilerie gardens.*

They stayed there in the clearing for nearly three hours, waiting for the sun's heat to diminish so that they could go for a longer walk in the country before dinner. Camille talked about work, and told inane stories; then, worn out, he lay back and fell asleep, after covering his eyes with his hat. Thérèse, her eyes closed, had already been pretending to doze for a long time.

Now, Laurent began to slide slowly towards her until, stretching forward with his lips, he deposited a kiss first on her shoe, then on her ankle. As he did so, the leather and the white stocking seemed to burn his mouth. The heady smell of the earth, mingled with Thérèse's delicate fragrance, went to his head, setting his blood on fire and his nerves on edge. For a month he had been living in a state of frustrated chastity. The walk along the road to Saint-Ouen in the full sun had set him aflame. Now there he was, hidden away in an isolated retreat, amid the sensual shade and the silence, yet unable to take into his arms the woman who already belonged to him. Her husband might wake up and see them, then all their precautions would be in vain. That man was always getting in the way. And the lover, stretched out on the ground, hiding behind his mistress's skirts, trembling with frustration, pressed silent kisses on her shoe and her stocking. Thérèse, playing dead, did not move a muscle; Laurent thought she was asleep.

He stood up, as his back had started aching, and leaned against a tree. Then he saw that she was actually staring up into the air, her eyes shining and wide open. Her face, framed

between her raised arms, was dull and pallid, with a cold rigidity about it. She was deep in thought. Her unblinking eyes were like a dark chasm in which nothing could be seen but black night. She lay there motionless, without turning to look at Laurent as he stood behind her.

Her lover studied her, almost frightened to see her so motionless and unresponsive to his caresses. This deathly white face, drowning in the folds of her skirts, filled him with a mixture of fear and sharp desire. He wanted to lean forwards and kiss her staring eyes shut. But Camille was also there asleep, lying almost on her petticoats. This pathetic creature, his skinny body slumped awkwardly on the ground, was snoring gently; beneath the hat which half covered his face, his mouth gaped open, twisted by sleep into a foolish grimace; the pasty flesh of his scraggy chin was sullied here and there by little reddish hairs, and with his head tipped backwards his wrinkled, scrawny neck could be seen, in the middle of which his prominent, brick-red Adam's apple bobbed up and down with every snore. Sprawled thus in sleep, Camille was an exasperating and unprepossessing sight.

Laurent, who was watching him, suddenly raised his heel in the air; he was going to stamp on Camille's face once and for all.

Thérèse stifled a cry, went white, and shut her eyes. She turned her head away as if to avoid being spattered with blood.

And, for a few seconds, Laurent's foot hovered above the sleeping Camille's face. Then, slowly, he brought his leg down and moved a few paces further away. He had realized that to murder him like that would be utterly stupid; if he stove in Camille's head, he would soon have the whole police force after him. He only wanted to get rid of him in order to marry Thérèse, and he intended to live it up after the crime, like whoever it was who had murdered the wagoner in the story old Michaud had told them.

He went down to the water's edge and watched the river flowing by with a vacant expression on his face. Then, suddenly, he plunged back into the copse; at last he had hit on a plan, a convenient murder that would not put him in any danger.

He woke up the sleeping man by tickling his nose with a

straw. Camille sneezed and got up, remarking on what a fine joke it was. He liked Laurent for his pranks, which always made him laugh. Then he shook his wife as she had kept her eyes tight shut; when Thérèse had stood up and shaken out her skirts, which were all creased and covered in dead leaves, they made their way out of the clearing, snapping off any twigs in their path.

They left the island and set off, along tracks and paths thick with groups of people in their Sunday best. Girls in bright-coloured dresses ran about among the hedges; a crew of oarsmen sang as they went by; strings of well-off and respectable couples, elderly people, office workers out with their wives, all sauntered along beside the ditches. Every path was like a crowded and noisy street. Only the sun maintained its aloof calm; as it declined towards the horizon, it cast immense pools of pale brightness on the reddening trees and white roads. A penetrating chill was beginning to settle out of the quivering sky.

Camille no longer had Thérèse on his arm; he was chatting with Laurent and laughing at his friend's jokes and amazing feats, as he jumped ditches and lifted huge boulders. Thérèse walked along on the other side of the road with head bent, occasionally stooping to pick a blade of grass. When she had fallen some way behind, she stopped and watched her lover and her husband from a distance.

'Come on, aren't you hungry?' Camille eventually called back to her.

'Of course!' she replied.

'Well get a move on, then!'

Thérèse was not hungry, but she was tired and anxious. She did not know what Laurent was up to, though she was so apprehensive that her legs were trembling beneath her.

The three came back down to the river bank to look for a restaurant. They sat down at a table on a sort of wooden verandah outside a cheap eating house which stank of grease and wine. The place was full of shouting and singing and the clatter of crockery; in all the private alcoves, and larger rooms too, there were parties of trippers talking in loud voices, and the thin partitions made the din even louder with their vibration. The staircase shook as the waiters ran up it.

Up there on the verandah the greasy odours were wafted away by the breeze from the river. Thérèse leaned against the balustrade and looked along the riverbank. To the left and the right stretched a double row of bars and fairground stalls; beneath arbours and through the last of the yellowish leaves of the trees she could see white table-cloths, black coats, and the bright colours of women's dresses; people were coming and going, bare-headed, running around and laughing; and to the raucous din of the crowd were added the dismal tones of barrel organs. A smell of fried food and dust lingered in the still air.

Down below Thérèse, some tarts from the Latin Quarter were dancing in a circle on a patch of worn grass, chanting a children's rhyme. With their hats tipped back on their shoulders and their hair loose, they were holding hands and playing like little girls. They had rediscovered something of their childish voices, and their pale faces, bruised by brutal caresses, had taken on a delicately virginal blush; an occasional emotional tear came into the corner of their wide-open, brazen eyes. Some students sat watching them dance, smoking clay pipes and making lewd remarks at their expense.

Further away, the serenity of evening was falling on the river and the little hills beyond, as the air filled with vague bluish vapours which drowned the trees in a transparent mist.

'Hey, waiter!' Laurent shouted down the staircase, leaning over the banister, 'what about our dinner?'

Then, seeming to change his mind, he went on:

'I say, Camille, how about going out in a boat before we settle down to eat? It will give them time to roast our chicken for us. Otherwise we'll get bored stiff hanging around for an hour.'

'If you like,' replied Camille without enthusiasm. 'But Thérèse is hungry.'

'No, no, I can wait,' Thérèse hastened to reply, as Laurent gave her a meaningful look.

They all went back down. As they passed the counter they reserved a table and decided on what to eat, saying they would be back in an hour. Since the restaurant owner also hired out boats, they asked him to come and untie one for them. Laurent selected a narrow skiff whose flimsiness frightened Camille.

'Good grief!' he exclaimed, 'we'll have to keep pretty still in that, or we'll be in for an early bath!'

The truth was that he was horribly afraid of water. When he was a child at Vernon his sickly state prevented him from splashing about in the Seine, and, while his school friends ran down to the river and dived straight in, he always stayed wrapped up in warm blankets at home. Whereas Laurent had become an intrepid swimmer and indefatigable oarsman, Camille had never lost that terror women and children have of deep water. He prodded the end of the little boat with his toe as if to convince himself it was strong enough.

'Come on then, in you get,' shouted Laurent with a laugh. 'You're always a bundle of nerves!'

Camille stepped over the side and wobbled his way to the stern, where he sat down. When he felt the wooden seat beneath him, he spread himself out and cracked a joke, to show his bravery.

Thérèse had stayed on the bank, solemn and unmoving, standing next to her lover who was holding the mooring rope. He bent down and said to her in an urgent whisper:

'Watch out, I'm going to throw him in ... Just do as I say ... I'll take care of everything.'

She went horribly pale, standing as if rooted to the spot; her body stiffened and her eyes widened.

'Go on, get in the boat,' whispered Laurent.

She did not make a move. A terrible struggle was taking place within her and she had to stretch her will-power to breaking-point to avoid bursting into tears and collapsing on the ground.

'Ha, ha!' exclaimed Camille. 'Laurent, look at Thérèse. She's the one who's scared! Will she, won't she . . . ?'

He was lying sprawled on the seat in the stern with his elbows propped on either side of the boat, putting on a show of bravado. Thérèse gave him a peculiar look; his sneering jibes were like a whiplash which compelled her to act. Suddenly, she jumped in. She stayed up at the prow. Laurent took the oars. The boat left the bank and headed slowly out towards the islands.

Dusk was falling. The trees were casting long shadows and the water along the edges of the river was black; in the middle

there were wide streaks of pale silver. Soon the boat was right out in mid-Seine. Now all the noises of the riverside were muted; by the time it reached them, the singing and shouting sounded muted and melancholy, sad and languid. The smell of fried food and dust had gone; there was a freshness in the air, and it now felt chilly.

Laurent stopped rowing and let the little boat drift downstream.

In front of them there rose the great russet mass of the islands. The two banks, dark brown speckled with grey, stretched away like two broad bands converging at the distant horizon. Water and sky seemed to have been cut out of the same whitish cloth. Nothing has quite the sorrowful calm of an autumn evening; the light seems pale in the quivering air and the trees shed their old leaves. The whole countryside, burnt up by the fiery rays of summer, feels death approaching with the first chill winds, and the skies fill with their plaintive and despairing gusts. Night descends, bearing shrouds in its shadow.

The three kept silent. Sitting in the boat as it drifted with the current, they watched the last glimmer of light depart from the tops of the trees. They were getting near the islands. The great russet masses were now darker; the whole landscape was becoming simplified in the half-light; the Seine, the sky, the islands, and the little hills were no more than brown and grey patches fading into a milky mist.

Camille, who had ended up lying on his stomach with his head hanging out over the side, dipped his hands in the water.

'Golly, it isn't half cold!' he exclaimed. 'It wouldn't be much fun taking a nose-dive into that!'

Laurent made no reply. For a while now he had been anxiously scrutinizing both banks; he began sliding his great hands along towards his knees, and his lips tightened. Thérèse, sitting stiff and motionless, her head tilted slightly back, waited.

The boat was about to move into a dark, narrow channel between two islands. From the far side of one of them could be heard the muffled song of a crew of oarsmen who must be rowing back up the Seine. In the distance upstream the river was empty.

Then Laurent stood up and seized Camille around his waist. The clerk burst out laughing.

'No, stop it, you're tickling me!' he said. 'Now that's enough larking about! Come on, stop it or you'll make me fall in!'

Laurent squeezed harder and gave a heave. Camille turned round and saw the terrifying, contorted expression on his friend's face. He did not understand, but was seized by an obscure dread. He tried to cry out but felt a rough hand grab him round the throat. Instinctively, like an animal defending itself, he pulled himself up on to his knees, clutching at the side of the boat. He struggled like that for a few seconds.

'Thérèse! Thérèse!' he called out in a stifled, rasping voice.

The young woman looked on, holding on to one of the seats with both hands as the boat creaked and danced on the river. She was unable to close her eyes, for a fearful muscular contraction kept them wide open, riveted on the horrific spectacle of the struggle. She was rigid and speechless.

'Thérèse! Thérèse!' the unfortunate Camille called again, now at his last gasp.

At this final appeal for help Thérèse burst into tears. Her nerve had broken, and the crisis that she had been dreading flung her trembling into the bottom of the boat. There she lay, collapsed in a heap and half dead.

Laurent was still shaking Camille and squeezing him by the throat. He eventually managed to wrench him away from the boat with his other hand, and held him up in the air like a child in his powerful, outstretched arms. As his head was thrown back and the neck unprotected, his victim, crazed with rage and terror, twisted round and sank his teeth into it. Then the murderer, stifling a howl of pain, flung the clerk into the river, but the teeth took with them a lump of his flesh.

Camille fell into the water with a scream. He came back to the surface two or three times, and his cries became more muffled each time.

Laurent did not lose a second. First, he turned up the collar of his jacket to conceal his wounds. Then he seized hold of Thérèse, who had passed out, flipped the boat over with a twist of his feet, and, still holding his mistress, dropped into the Seine. He held her up above water, calling piteously for help.

The oarsmen whose singing he had heard from the far side

of the island rowed energetically over towards them. They realized that something unfortunate had just happened; they rescued Thérèse, whom they laid on a seat, and Laurent, who began to lament at the death of his friend. He threw himself back into the water and looked for Camille in all the places where he could not possibly be, and returned in tears, wringing his hands and tearing his hair. The rowers tried to pacify and console him.

'It's all my fault,' he shouted; 'I should never have let the poor fellow dance about like that in the boat. At one point we must all have been on the same side, then we capsized. As he went in, he shouted to me to save his wife.'

As always happens in such cases, two or three of the young oarsmen claimed to have witnessed the accident.

'Yes, we saw you all right,' they said. 'God knows, when you're in a rowing boat you can't just jump about as if you were on dry land. Oh! the poor little thing, what a terrible awakening she's in for!'

They took up their oars again, towed the boat back, and led Thérèse and Laurent to the restaurant, where their dinner was ready. News of the accident went all round Saint-Ouen in a few minutes. The rowing crew told the story of what had happened as if they had seen it all with their own eyes. A crowd of sympathizers took up station outside.

The proprietor and his wife were good people, who placed their wardrobes at the disposal of the shipwrecked pair. When Thérèse came round from her faint, she had a fit of hysterics and burst out in heart-rending sobs; she had to be put to bed. Thus nature made its own contribution to the sinister performance which had just been played out.

When she had calmed down, Laurent placed her in the safe keeping of the restaurant owners, saying that he wanted to return to Paris alone in order to break the appalling news to Madame Raquin as tactfully as possible. The truth was that he was afraid of what Thérèse would do in her overwrought nervous state. He preferred to give her time to think things over and learn her part.

It was the boating crew who ate Camille's dinner.

XII

In a dark corner of the public omnibus which brought him back to Paris, Laurent put the finishing touches to his plan. He was almost certain he would get away with it. His heart was filled with the anxious, grim joy of a crime accomplished. When he arrived at the Clichy barrier,* he took a cab to where old Michaud lived, in the Rue de Seine. It was nine in the evening.

He found the former police superintendent sitting down to eat, in the company of Olivier and Suzanne. He had decided to go there to cover himself in case anyone should suspect him, and to avoid having to break the dreadful news to Madame Raquin in person. That was something he felt peculiarly loath to do, for he fully expected her to be so grief-stricken that he would be unable to summon sufficient tears to act his own part credibly; moreover, he found the thought of her maternal anguish oppressive, although he didn't really care about it otherwise.

When Michaud saw him come in wearing scruffy clothes that were too small for him, he looked at him quizzically. Laurent related the accident in a broken voice, as if hardly able to speak with grief and fatigue.

'So I came to find you,' he said in conclusion, 'because I didn't know what to do about those two poor women who have been so cruelly struck down. I just didn't have the courage to go and see his mother on my own. Please, will you come with me?'

While he was speaking, Olivier stared at him with a fixity which filled him with terror. The murderer had thrown himself headlong into this police lair in an act of daring calculated to save him. But he could not prevent himself from trembling as he felt the scrutiny of their gaze, and saw suspicion where there was really only incredulity and pity. Suzanne, turning pale, looked more fragile than ever, and close to fainting. Olivier, afraid of the idea of death but otherwise absolutely unmoved

by the story, took on an expression of grief and suprise as he examined Laurent's face, purely out of habit and without in the least suspecting the sinister truth. As for old Michaud, he uttered exclamations of shock, sympathy, and astonishment, shuffling around on his chair, clasping his hands together and raising his eyes to heaven.

'Oh! my God', he said in a half-choking voice, 'Oh! my God, what an appalling thing! You have only to go out of the house and suddenly, you're dead, just like that. It's horrible! And poor Madame Raquin, his dear mother—whatever are we to tell her? Yes, indeed, you were quite right to come to us . . . We'll certainly go with you.'

He stood up and shuffled up and down the room, looking everywhere for his hat and stick, all the time making Laurent go back over the details of the catastrophe and exclaiming anew at each sentence.

They all four went downstairs. At the entrance to the Passage du Pont-Neuf Michaud stopped Laurent.

'Don't come up,' he said to him. 'Your presence would give the game away that something awful has happened. His unfortunate mother will suspect the worst and make us come out with the truth before we are ready. You wait here for us.'

This arrangement was a relief to the murderer, who was trembling at the thought of going into the arcade. His composure returned and he began to walk up and down the pavement, in perfect peace of mind. At times he quite forgot the turn of events, and started looking into shop windows and whistling between his teeth, or turned round to eye up women who brushed past him. He stayed there in the street for a good half hour, feeling more and more his usual self.

He had not had anything to eat since the morning so, overcome by hunger, he went into a *pâtisserie* and stuffed himself with cakes.

Meanwhile, in the shop in the Passage du Pont-Neuf, a heart-rending scene was going on. Despite all Michaud's precautions and his affectionate and considerate words, the moment came when Madame Raquin realized that something dreadful had happened to her son. At once she demanded to know the truth, with such despairing insistence and such wailing and floods of tears that her old friend gave way. When she

was finally told, her grief was tragic to behold. She went utterly to pieces, her whole body racked by stifled sobs of horror and despair which jolted her backwards and left her hardly able to breathe, while from time to time a shrill shriek welled up from the bleak depths of her grief. She would have grovelled on the floor if Suzanne had not put her arms round her waist and shed tears on her knees, lifting her white face up to look at her. Olivier and his father stood there in awkward silence, looking away, disagreeably affected by a scene which could so upset their manly self-esteem.

The poor mother had visions of her son tumbling about in the rough waters of the Seine, his body horribly stiff and bloated; and at the same time she saw him as a little baby in his cradle and herself chasing away the figure of death as it hovered over him. She had brought him back into the world at least a dozen times; she loved him for all the love she had shown him over thirty years. And now he had died far away from her, all of a sudden, in the cold dirty water, like a dog. Then she remembered the warm blankets in which she used to envelop him. Such lavish care, such a warm, cosy childhood, such coaxing and outpourings of affection, all to see him wretchedly drowned like that! At these thoughts, Madame Raquin felt a great lump rise in her throat; she hoped she would die, suffocated by her despair.

Leaving Suzanne with the old lady, Michaud and Olivier hurried outside to find Laurent, and set off with all speed back to Saint-Ouen.

Scarcely a word was exchanged between them on the way. Each had buried himself in a corner of the cab which jolted them along through cobbled streets, and they sat silent and motionless in the gloom. From time to time a gas light would cast its bright but fleeting glow on their faces. They were enveloped in a lugubrious cloud of despondency by the sinister event which had brought them together.

When they eventually arrived at the riverside café, they found Thérèse lying in bed, her hands and face burning hot. The proprietor told them in low tones that the young lady had a temperature. The truth was that Thérèse, feeling weak and lacking courage, and fearing that she might own up about the murder in a fit of nerves, had decided to feign illness.

So she stayed grimly silent, keeping her eyes and lips tight shut and refusing to see anyone in case she said too much. With the sheets pulled up to her chin and her face half hidden in the pillow, she made herself as small as possible and listened anxiously to what was being said around her. And amid the reddish glow which filtered through her closed eyelids, she kept seeing Camille and Laurent struggling on one side of the boat, followed by her husband's form, wan, horrific, and larger than life, rising straight out of the muddy waters of the river. This relentlessly returning vision stoked up the fever in her blood.

Old Michaud attempted to speak to her and console her. With a gesture of impatience she turned over and started sobbing again.

'Leave her alone, Sir,' said the café owner, 'the slightest noise starts her trembling. What she needs, you know, is rest.'

Down below, in the main dining-room, a policeman was taking details of the accident. Michaud and his son went downstairs, followed by Laurent. Once Olivier had made it known that he was a senior official at the Prefecture, the whole business was over in ten minutes. The rowers were still there, recounting the drowning in minute detail, describing how the three had fallen into the water and generally presenting themselves as eye-witnesses. If Olivier and his father had been in the slightest bit suspicious, their fears would have been utterly allayed. But they had never doubted the truth of Laurent's story for an instant; on the contrary, they introduced him to the policeman as the victim's best friend, and they made sure that he noted in his report the fact that the young man had plunged into the water to save Camille Raquin. The following day the accident was reported in the newspapers with a great wealth of detail. The unfortunate mother, the inconsolable widow, the brave and noble friend—the story had everything, and it soon went the rounds of the Parisian press, before being picked up by the provincial rags, where it finally faded from view.

When the policeman had finished taking statements, Laurent felt a hot surge of joy run through his body, putting new life into him. Since the moment when his victim had sunk his teeth into his neck, he had as it were stiffened himself, acting mechanically according to a plan worked out long in

advance. Every action, word, and gesture had been dictated solely by an instinct for self-preservation. Now that he was sure he was not going to be found out, his blood began to course regularly and pleasantly again through his veins. The police had passed close to his crime and seen nothing; they had been fooled into believing him innocent. He was safe. This thought sent a delicious sweat of relief running down his body, filling him with a warm glow which restored his suppleness of limb and quickness of mind. He carried on playing the part of a grief-stricken friend with incomparable skill and self-possession. In fact, though, he was enjoying a purely animal satisfaction; and he was thinking about Thérèse, lying upstairs in the bedroom.

'We can't leave this unfortunate young woman here,' he said to Michaud. 'She may be on the verge of a serious illness; we absolutely have to take her back to Paris. Come on, we must convince her to come with us.'

Upstairs, he spoke to Thérèse himself, begging her to get up and let them take her back to the Passage du Pont-Neuf. When she heard the sound of his voice she shuddered, opened her eyes wide, and looked at him. She was dazed and trembling; with great difficulty she sat up but did not reply. The men went out of the room, leaving her alone with the proprietor's wife. When she had dressed, she went shakily downstairs and was helped into the cab by Olivier.

The journey passed in silence. With consummate impudence and daring Laurent slid his hand across Thérèse's skirt until he could hold her fingers. He was sitting opposite her in the shifting shadows; as she kept her head bowed he could not see her face. Having grasped her hand, he squeezed it firmly in his own all the way back to the Rue Mazarine. He could feel it trembling, but it was not drawn back; instead, from time to time it gave a sudden squeeze of its own. And the two hands were burning hot, their palms damp and sticky and their tightly interlaced fingers squashed together at every jolt. It seemed to Laurent and Thérèse that their blood was circulating through their joined hands and round each other's hearts, so that their hands became the fiery focus of all their bubbling life-force. In the dark of the night and the desolate silence which hung everywhere, this frantic hand-clasp was

like a crushing weight heaped on to Camille's head to keep him underwater.

When the cab came to a halt, Michaud and his son got out first. Laurent leaned over to his mistress and whispered:

'Be strong, Thérèse. We have a long time to wait. Don't forget . . . '

The young woman had still not spoken. Now she opened her lips for the first time since the death of her husband.

'Oh! I shan't forget,' she said with a shudder, in a voice hardly louder than a breath.

Olivier held out his hand, offering to help her down. This time Laurent went into the shop. Madame Raquin was lying down, suffering from a serious attack of délirium. Thérèse dragged herself to her bed and Suzanne scarcely had time to undress her. Reassured that everything was turning out for the best, Laurent withdrew and walked slowly back to his squalid quarters in the Rue Saint-Victor.

It was now past midnight. A cool breeze was blowing through the silent, deserted streets, and the young man could hear only the regular sound of his own footsteps on the pavement. The cool air filled him with a sense of well-being, the silence and the shadows gave him momentary sensations of pleasure. He slowed to a stroll.

He was relieved to have committed his crime at last. He had killed Camille and now the whole thing was over and done with; nothing more would ever be said. From now on he was going to live in peace and quiet, until it was time to take possession of Thérèse. The thought of committing a murder had choked him at times with panic; now that he had succeeded, a weight had been lifted from his chest, he could breathe easily again, and he was free of the anxiety which fear and hesitation had inflicted.

He was actually in rather a dazed state, and his limbs and his thoughts were weighed down by tiredness. He went home and fell into a deep sleep, but, while he slept, slight nervous twitchings passed across his face.

XIII

THE next morning Laurent awoke feeling refreshed and in good spirits. He had slept well. The cold air coming in through the window quickened his sluggish blood. He scarcely remembered the events of the day before; were it not for the burning sensation in his neck, he might have thought he had gone to bed at ten after an uneventful evening. But Camille's deep bite was like the burn of a red-hot iron on his skin, and, whenever the pain of the injury intruded upon his thoughts, it hurt him most cruelly. It felt like a dozen needles slowly penetrating his flesh.

He turned down his shirt-collar and studied the wound in a cheap, tarnished mirror on the wall. It was a red gash the size of a two-sous coin; the skin had been torn away to expose the pinkish flesh, which had black spots in it; trickles of blood had run down as far as the shoulder, leaving congealed trails which were now flaking off. Against the white of the neck, the bite stood out a deep and powerful brown; it was on the right, below the ear. Laurent stooped forward and stretched his neck out to see, and the greenish mirror distorted his expression into an atrocious grimace.

He washed thoroughly, satisfied with his examination and telling himself that the wound would heal over in a few days. Then he dressed and went quietly to the office, as usual. There he told the story of the accident with emotion in his voice. When his colleagues read the reports that were going round in the papers, he became a real hero. For a week all the employees of the Orleans Railway had just one topic of conversation; they were all proud that one of their number had been drowned. Grivet waxed lyrical on the imprudence of venturing out into the middle of the Seine when it is so easy to watch the river flowing by from a bridge.

But Laurent still had one nagging worry. They had not been able to record Camille's death officially. Thérèse's husband was certainly dead, but the murderer would have preferred

his body to be found so that a formal certificate could be issued. The day after the accident a fruitless search had been made for the drowned man's body; it was thought that it had probably become wedged in some hole in the bank of one of the islands. There were scavengers actively scouring the Seine in the hope of claiming the reward.

Laurent gave himself the task of dropping in at the Morgue* every morning on his way to work. He had sworn to make sure of everything himself. Although it made him feel sick with repugnance and occasionally sent shivers down his spine, he went there regularly for over a week to examine the faces of all the people who had drowned, laid out on the slabs.

When he went in, a stale, sickly smell turned his stomach, the smell of scrubbed flesh, and chill draughts made his skin prickle; the dampness of the walls seemed to weigh down his clothes at the shoulders. He went straight over to the glass screen which separated the onlookers from the corpses, pressed his pale face up against the glass, and looked in. Rows of grey slabs stretched out in front of him. Here and there naked bodies stood out in patches of colour, green and yellow, white and red, against the slabs; some of them had kept their flesh intact in the rigidity of death, while others looked like heaps of bloody, rotting meat. At the back, hanging against the wall, were pathetic rags of trousers and skirts grimly contorted against the bare plaster. At first Laurent saw only the greyish background of stones and walls and the blotches of red and black made by the clothes and the corpses. There was a tinkling of running water.

Gradually he began to make out individual bodies; then he went along from one to another. He was only interested in those who had drowned; if there were several corpses swollen and blue from the water, he would examine them avidly in the hope of recognizing Camille. Often, the flesh of their faces would be peeling off in strips, with bones poking through the softened skin, so that the whole thing looked mushy and formless. Laurent hesitated, studying each body and trying to see in it the skinny frame of his victim. But drowned corpses are always bloated; he saw enormous bellies, bulging thighs, and rounded, powerful arms. Unable to decide, he stood shivering in front of these greenish hunks of meat, which

seemed to be mocking him with their leering grimaces.

One morning he had a terrible fright. He had been looking at one drowned man, small and horribly disfigured, for a number of minutes. His flesh was so softened and decomposed that the water running over the corpse was washing it away scrap by scrap. The jet playing on the face was digging a hole to the left of the nose. All of a sudden the nose collapsed and the lips came away, showing the white teeth below, and the drowned head split itself with grim laughter.

Each time he thought he had recognized Camille, Laurent felt a burning in his heart. He desperately wanted to find his victim's body, but whenever he imagined that it was indeed there in front of him his courage failed him. His visits to the Morgue gave him nightmares and fits of shuddering which left him panting for breath. He shook off his fears and told himself not to act like a child; he wanted to be strong, but, despite himself, his body refused, and his whole being was overcome by revulsion and horror as soon as he found himself in the damp, sickly-smelling atmosphere of the mortuary.

Sometimes he reached the last row of slabs and there were no drowning cases, so he breathed more easily and his repugnance diminished somewhat. Then he became simply a curious visitor, taking a strange pleasure in looking violent death in the face and seeing the lugubriously bizarre and grotesque attitudes in which it takes people. He found such sights entertaining, particularly when there were women there with their bare breasts showing. Such brutal displays of nudity, the bodies spattered with blood and sometimes even with holes in them, attracted him and held him spellbound. On one occasion he saw a young woman of twenty, a working-class girl, strong and buxom, who seemed to be lying asleep on the stone. Her plump, fresh body had gone an extremely soft and delicate shade of white; she was half smiling, her head tipped gently to one side, and was provocatively offering her bosom to his gaze. She would have looked just like a harlot stretched out on a bed, were it not for the black stripe around her neck which gave her a sort of shadowy necklace; in fact, she was an ordinary girl who had hanged herself out of unrequited love. Laurent looked at her for a long time, running his eyes all over her body, absorbed in a kind of fearful lust.

Every morning while he was there he could hear the public coming and going behind him.

The Morgue is a show within the reach of every purse, something which passers-by, rich or poor, can enjoy for nothing. The door is open; anyone who wishes to walk in can do so. There are connoisseurs who go out of their way not to miss a single one of these morbid spectacles. When the slabs are bare, people go away disappointed, feeling they have been swindled and muttering between their teeth. When they are well covered with a fine display of human flesh, the visitors jostle each other for cheap thrills, exclaiming in horror and joking, applauding, or whistling as if they were at the theatre, and go away well satisfied, declaring that the Morgue has certainly put on a good show that day.

Laurent soon began to recognize the regulars, a disparate mixture of people who all came to weep or cackle in each other's company. Some were labourers on the way to work, carrying their tools and a loaf of bread under their arm; they always thought death was terribly funny. Among them were apprentice wags who made the onlookers smile by passing some droll comment on each corpse's particular grimace; they called those who had died in fires coal-men; the hanged, the murdered, the drowned, and bodies which had been crushed or mutilated, stimulated them to particular feats of wit, and in somewhat tremulous voices they stammered out their comic remarks in the shivering silence of the mortuary. Then there were thin, dessicated old men of the better-off sort, out for a stroll and with nothing better to do, who looked at the bodies with the foolish distaste of refined and peaceable citizens. There were also great numbers of women: young working-girls with pink complexions, in white linen and clean skirts, who slipped nimbly along from one end of the glass screen to the other, their eyes wide open and attentive as if they were staring in the window of a fashion store; poor women, with stunned expressions on their faces and a pitiful air, and fashionably dressed ladies swishing nonchalantly past in their silk dresses.

One day Laurent saw one of these ladies standing transfixed a few steps back from the glass screen, holding a cambric handkerchief up to her nose. She was wearing a gorgeous grey

silk skirt and a cape of black lace; her face was partly covered by a veil, and her gloved hands looked tiny and extremely slender. Around her there lingered the sweet perfume of violets. She was staring at a corpse. A few feet away, stretched out on a slab, lay the body of a strapping young man, a mason who had just fallen to his death from a scaffolding; he had a powerful chest, his muscles were taut and prominent, and his flesh white and well nourished; death had turned him into a marble statue. The lady carried on examining him, turning him over, as it were, and weighing him with her gaze. The sight of this man completely enthralled her. She lifted a corner of her veil and looked once more, then went away.

Occasionally gangs of boys would turn up, mere children between twelve and fifteen years old, who would run the length of the screen, stopping only in front of female corpses. They pushed their hands against the glass and stared impudently at the bared breasts. They dug each other in the ribs and made lewd remarks, learning about vice at the school of death; the Morgue is where many a young lout makes the acquaintance of his first mistress.

After a week of this Laurent felt heartily sick. At night he had nightmares about the corpses he had seen in the morning. Eventually, the loathsome and disgusting daily round into which he had forced himself began to disturb him so much that he resolved to go only twice more. The next day, on entering the Morgue, he received a violent blow to the heart: there in front of him, laid out on a slab on his back, with his head raised and his eyes half open, was Camille, staring up at him.

The murderer walked slowly over to the glass screen as though drawn by a strange attraction, unable to take his eyes off his victim. He felt no pain, only a sensation of deep cold inside and a slight pricking of the skin. He would have expected to be shaking more than he was. He stayed stock still for five long minutes, lost in unconscious contemplation, engraving in his memory, in spite of himself, each horrible line and each foul colour of the picture which he had before his eyes.

Camille was a revolting sight. He had been in the water for a fortnight. His face still looked firm and stiff; his features had been preserved, only the skin had taken on a yellowish, muddy hue. The head, thin, bony, and slightly puffy, was

grimacing; it was at a slight angle, the hair was plastered against the temples, and the eyelids were up, revealing the globular whites of the eyes; the lips were twisted down at one corner in a horrible sneer; the blackish tip of the tongue was poking out between the white teeth. This head, stretched and tanned like leather, was all the more shocking in its expression of pain and terror for having kept a human appearance. The body had been horribly battered and looked like a heap of decomposing flesh. It was clear that hardly anything was holding the arms on any more, for the shoulder-blades protruded through the skin of the shoulders. The ribs made black stripes across the greenish chest, and the left side of the body had burst open, leaving a hole with jagged, dark red edges. The whole torso was rotten. The legs were more solid and stretched straight out, but were covered in disgusting blotches. The feet were falling off.

Laurent looked hard at Camille. He had never before seen such a horrific case of drowning. On top of everything else the corpse had taken on a shrunken appearance; it looked scrawny and pathetic, all huddled up into a tiny heap as it rotted away. Anyone would have guessed straightaway that he was only a twelve-hundred-franc employee, sickly and stupid, whose mother had fed him on herbal infusions. This poor body which had grown up wrapped in warm blankets now lay shivering on a cold slab.

When Laurent finally managed to tear himself away from the sight before which a harrowing curiosity held him gaping and motionless, he went outside and began walking quickly along the embankment. And as he walked he said to himself over and over again: 'That's what I've done to him; he looks disgusting.' He felt sure he was being followed around by a pungent smell, the smell which the putrefying body would now be giving off.

He went to find old Michaud and told him that he had just recognized Camille's body on a slab at the Morgue. The formalities were duly completed, the drowned man was buried, and a death certificate issued. Laurent, certain now that he was safe, threw himself luxuriously into the task of forgetting his crime, and the irritating and distressing scenes which had followed the murder.

XIV

THE shop in the Passage du Pont-Neuf remained closed for three days. When it opened again, it seemed even damper and more gloomy. The stock on display, yellowed by dust, wore the same air of mourning as the rest of the household; in the dirty windows things lay about in disorder. Behind the cotton bonnets hanging from rusty rails, Thérèse's face had a duller, more earthy pallor and a sinister, unmoving calm.

All along the arcade the old wives were exchanging pitying comments about what had happened. The woman who sold costume jewellery pointed out to each of her clients how much thinner the young widow's face had become, as if she were some interesting and pitiful curiosity.

For three days Madame Raquin and Thérèse had stayed in their beds, without speaking, without even seeing each other. The old haberdasher, propped up on her pillows, stared straight ahead with an idiot gaze. The death of her son had dealt her a great blow to the head, and she had been knocked senseless. She sat there for hours at a time, calm and motionless, lost in the emptiness of her despair and seized from time to time by fits of weeping, screaming, and delirium. In the neighbouring room Thérèse seemed to be asleep; she had turned to face the wall and pulled the blanket up over her eyes, and there she lay stretched out, stiff and silent, with not a single sob disturbing the bedclothes that covered her. It was as if she were hiding away, in the darkness of the bed, those thoughts which had taken away her power of movement. Suzanne, who was looking after the two women, shuffled quietly from one to the other, bending her waxen face over the two beds, unable either to make Thérèse turn to face her instead of shrugging her off impatiently, or to console Madame Raquin, whose tears began to flow whenever the sound of a voice startled her out of her collapsed state.

On the third day Thérèse threw back the bedclothes and sat up on the edge of the bed with a kind of feverish resolve.

Brushing her hair aside, she sat for a while with her hands on her temples, staring straight ahead and apparently lost in thought. Then she jumped out of bed. Her limbs were red and trembling with fever; her skin, which in places hung in folds as thought empty of flesh, was marbled with great livid blotches. She had suddenly aged.

When she entered the room, Suzanne stood still in surprise at finding her up, and in her placid, languid voice she advised her to go back to bed and rest a little longer. Thérèse took no notice; she was looking for her clothes and putting them on with hurried, trembling movements. When she had dressed she went to look at herself in the mirror, rubbed her eyes, and ran her hands over her face as if to wipe something away. Then, without uttering a word, she walked quickly through the dining-room and went in to see Madame Raquin.

The former haberdasher was in a calm, dazed state. When Thérèse entered she turned her head and watched the young widow cross the room until she stood before her, silent and downcast. The two women looked at each other for a few seconds, the niece with growing anxiety, the aunt making painful efforts to remember. When at last things came back to her, Madame Raquin held out her trembling arms, put them round Thérèse's neck, and cried out:

'My poor child, my poor Camille!'

She wept, and her tears dried on Thérèse's burning skin; Thérèse hid her own dry eyes in the folds of the sheet and stayed bending over the bed, waiting for the old woman to cry herself out. Since the murder, she had been dreading this first encounter; she had stayed in bed so as to delay the moment of its arrival and contemplate, undisturbed, the terrible role she now had to play.

When she saw that Madame Raquin was calmer, she started to fuss around her, advising her to get up and go down to the shop. The old haberdasher had almost regressed into childhood. The appearance of her niece had brought about a sudden improvement, which had now restored her memory and her awareness of things and people around her. She thanked Suzanne for looking after her, began to talk more, and, although very weak, was no longer delirious but overcome with grief, which sometimes made her choke. With occasional out-

bursts of tears she would watch Thérèse walking around; then she would call her over, put her arms round her once more, and tell her with a catch in her voice that she was all she had left in the world.

That evening she agreed to get up and try to have something to eat. Thérèse was then able to see what a terrible blow her aunt had received. The poor old woman's legs had become so bad that she needed a walking stick to drag herself through into the dining-room, and once she was there she felt as if the walls were swaying around her.

The very next morning, however, she insisted the shop should be opened. She was afraid of going mad if she stayed alone in her bedroom. She moved heavily downstairs, pausing on each step, and went to sit behind the counter, where she remained, serene and sad, from that day on.

By her side stood Thérèse, musing and waiting. The shop resumed its sombre calm.

XV

FROM time to time, every two or three days, Laurent would come round in the evening, stay in the shop for half an hour, chatting with Madame Raquin, then go away again without once having looked directly at Thérèse. The old haberdasher regarded him as her niece's saviour, a noble soul who had done everything in his power to give her back her son. She always welcomed him with affection and kindness.

One Thursday evening Laurent was there when old Michaud and Grivet came in. It was exactly eight o'clock. The employee and the former police chief had each decided independently of the other that they could now resume their pleasant routine without intruding, and they arrived at the very same minute, as if driven by the same mechanism. Behind them, Olivier and Suzanne also made their entrance.

They all went upstairs to the dining-room. Madame Raquin, who was not expecting anyone, hastily lit the lamp and went to make tea. When they were all seated round the table with cups in front of them, and the dominoes had been tipped out of their box, the poor mother, suddenly transported back into the past, looked round at her guests and burst into tears. There was one empty seat, the seat where her son used to sit.

Her despairing outburst plunged the whole company into a chill and awkward silence. Their faces wore an expression of selfish contentment. They felt embarrassed, for they had not kept the slightest memory of Camille alive in their hearts.

'Come now, dear lady,' exclaimed old Michaud a touch impatiently, 'you mustn't upset yourself so, you'll make yourself ill.'

'We're all mortal,' Grivet observed bluntly.

'Crying will never bring your son back,' said Olivier pompously.

'I beg you,' murmured Suzanne, 'don't make us all upset.'

As Madame Raquin only started sobbing louder, unable to staunch her tears, old Michaud went on:

'Come, come, pull yourself together now. We're here to amuse you, you know, so for heaven's sake don't let's all feel sorry for ourselves; try and forget ... We'll play for two sous a game, all right?'

Making a supreme effort, the haberdasher forced back her tears, aware perhaps of her guests' selfish smugness. Still shaking, she dried her eyes; the dominoes rattled in her poor hands and the tears which still clung beneath her eyelids made it difficult for her to see. The game began.

Laurent and Thérèse had watched this brief scene with solemn and impassive expressions. He was delighted to see the Thursday evening gatherings reinstated. That had been his dearest wish, for he knew that he would need them if he was to achieve his goal. Also, though he did not quite know why, he felt more at ease among these few people whom he knew, and could now look Thérèse in the eye again.

Thérèse, dressed all in black and with a pale and distant look, now seemed to him endowed with a beauty which he had not seen before. He was happy when her eyes met his and bravely sustained his gaze. She still belonged to him, body and soul.

XVI

FIFTEEN months went by. The stress of the first hours subsided; each day brought greater tranquility and indifference, and life resumed its normal languid course, slipping into the dull monotony which follows all great crises. And, at the beginning, Laurent and Thérèse fell in willingly with this new existence; but it was changing them, for a hidden process had taken place within them which would have to be analysed with extreme subtlety if one wished to differentiate its various phases.

Soon, Laurent was again dropping round at the shop every evening, as in the past; but he no longer ate there or settled down for the whole evening. He would arrive at half past nine and leave after locking up. It was as if he were fulfilling a duty by helping the two women in this way. If he ever neglected his task, he would apologize the next day with the humility of a servant. On Thursdays he helped Madame Raquin to light the fire and do the honours of the household. She was charmed by his quiet and considerate behaviour.

Thérèse calmly observed him as he busied himself around her. Her face had lost its pallor; she seemed to have softened and become more smiling and healthy. From time to time, however, a nervous contraction would still pinch the corners of her mouth into two deep lines which brought a strangely frightened, pained expression to her face.

The two lovers no longer made any attempt to see each other on their own. They never sought a rendez-vous or exchanged a furtive kiss. For the moment, the murder had as it were smothered the sensual fire in their flesh; by killing Camille, they had managed to assuage those fierce and insatiable desires which had remained unsatisfied while they had lain locked in each other's arms. The crime had given them a feeling of acute pleasure which made their embraces seem insipid and loathsome in comparison.

And yet they now had endless opportunities to lead the life

of free love of which they had dreamed and for which they had committed murder. The dazed, invalid Madame Raquin was no obstacle; the house belonged to them and they could come and go just as they wished. But love had lost its appeal, their appetite had disappeared; they stayed there quietly chatting, looking at each other without a blush or a shudder, as if they had forgotten the wild embraces that had bruised their flesh and made their bones crack. They even tried to avoid being alone together, for in such intimacy they could find nothing to say and neither wanted to show too much coldness. Whenever they shook hands, the touching of their skin made them feel slightly queasy.

In any case, they both believed that they knew what had caused the indifference and fear which had come between them. They put their coldness down to prudence, thinking that their calm and celibate behaviour was the product of superior wisdom. They pretended to themselves that this serenity of the flesh and slumber of the heart was what they themselves wanted. Furthermore, they saw the repugnance and unease that they were feeling as indications, left over from the shocking event, of some deep-down fear of punishment. From time to time they would try to renew their hope by force and pick up the thread of their passionate dreams again, but they were always astonished to find their imaginations empty. So they clung desperately to the idea that they would soon be married; when they had reached that goal, when all their fears were past and they belonged entirely to each other, they would rediscover their passion and taste the delights of which they had dreamed. This new hope made them calmer and stopped them from falling further into the void which had opened up within them. They managed to convince themselves that they loved each other as much as before, and awaited the hour which would make their happiness complete by binding them to each other for ever.

Never before had Thérèse known such peace of mind. She was undoubtedly turning into a more likeable person, as the implacable determination which had so governed her character began to relax.

At night, alone in her bed, she was happy; Camille's thin face and scrawny body were no longer there beside her to

frustrate her flesh and fill her with unsatisfied desires. She felt virginal again, like a little girl, as she lay there peacefully in the silence and the dark, surrounded by white bed curtains. She liked her large, rather cold bedroom, with its high ceiling, dark corners, and convent-like atmosphere. She even came to regard the great black wall which rose up in front of her window with affection; throughout one summer, each evening, she would stand for hours at a time looking at its dark stones and gazing up at the narrow strip of starry sky outlined by the chimneys and roof-tops above. She only ever thought of Laurent when a nightmare jolted her awake; then, sitting bolt upright with her nightdress clasped round her, shivering and wide-eyed, she told herself that she would not have such sudden frights if only there were a man lying by her side. She thought of her lover as she would a guard-dog, as someone to protect her; no flutter of desire ran across her cool, calm skin.

During the day, in the shop, she took more interest in things and came out of herself, no longer living in a state of inner revolt, with thoughts of hatred and vengeance bottled up inside her. Daydreaming now bored her; she needed action, and things to look at. From dawn to dusk she watched the people walking through the arcade, finding entertainment in their comings and goings and the noise they made. She became curious and talkative and, in short, was now a proper woman, for until then her actions and ideas had all been those of a man.

From her observation post she noticed a young man, a student, who lived in furnished lodgings in the vicinity and who passed by the shop several times a day. He was pale and handsome, with the luxuriant hair of a poet and an officer's moustache. Thérèse found him distinguished looking. She fell in love with him for a week, just like a schoolgirl. She began to read novels and compared the young man with Laurent, whom she found dull and coarse in comparison. Reading opened up romantic horizons of which she had known nothing until now; before, she had loved with her blood and her nerves, but now she began to love with her head. Then one day the student vanished; he had probably moved. She forgot all about him in a few hours.

She joined a subscription library and became passionately involved with the heroes of all the novels which came into her hands. This sudden love of reading had a great influence on her temperament; she developed a nervy sensitivity which made her laugh or cry for no reason. The balance which had been developing in her personality was now upset. She fell into a vague, dreamy state out of which she was jolted from time to time by thoughts of Camille; then she would long for Laurent again with a mixture of desire, fear, and misgiving. All this plunged her back into her earlier anxieties; sometimes she tried to work out a way of marrying her lover immediately, while at other times she thought of running away and never seeing him again. The novels she read, which were always about chastity and honour, put up a kind of barrier between her instincts and her will. She was still the fearless creature who had wanted to wrestle with the Seine and had flung herself headlong into adultery, but now she also became aware of what kindness and gentleness meant; she began to understand the meek face and passive attitude of Olivier's wife, and realized that it is possible to be happy without killing one's husband. This prevented her from seeing herself in her true light, and she lived in a cruel state of indecision.

Laurent, for his part, went through various phases of calm and fevered agitation. At first he felt profoundly at peace with himself, as if a great weight had been lifted from his mind. Occasionally he would wonder in astonishment whether it had not all been a bad dream, and whether he really had pushed Camille into the water and seen his body on a slab at the Morgue, after all. Thinking back to his crime, he was filled with a strange sense of astonishment; he would never have believed himself capable of committing a murder. Whenever he reflected that he might have been found out and guillotined, all his caution and cowardice rushed back, making him shudder and bringing a cold sweat to his brow as he felt the icy kiss of the blade on the back of his neck. While he had been busily occupied he had gone straight ahead, with the blind tenacity of a dumb beast. Now, when he looked back at the chasm which he had just crossed, he was overcome by terror and faintness of heart.

'I must really have been drunk,' he thought; 'that woman

must have intoxicated me with her caresses. Good God, what a crazy fool I've been! To risk the guillotine for something like that ... It went off all right in the end, but if I had my time again I wouldn't even consider it.'

Laurent subsided into inactivity and became more cowardly and cautious than ever. He was getting fat and letting himself go. Looking closely at his great lump of a body, which seemed to have neither bones nor sinews in it, nobody would have dreamt of accusing him of violence and cruelty.

He resumed his old life-style. For several months he was a model employee, fulfilling his allotted task with an exemplary absence of initiative. In the evenings he would eat in a cheap restaurant in the Rue Saint-Victor, slicing his bread thinly, chewing it slowly, and dragging his meal out as long as possible; then he would lean his chair back against the wall and smoke his pipe, looking for all the world like a large and jocular family man. During the day he thought about nothing; at night he slept heavily, without dreaming. With his pink, fleshy face, full stomach, and empty head, he was quite happy.

His fleshly appetite seemed to have died and he scarcely gave a thought to Thérèse, except as one thinks of a woman whom one will eventually marry, at some indeterminate date in the future. He awaited the hour of his marriage with patience, forgetting his wife-to-be but dreaming of the new position which would then be his: he would resign from the office, take up painting, and stroll about all day at his leisure. These hopes brought him back to the shop in the arcade every evening, despite the vague uneasiness which he felt whenever he went in.

One Sunday, feeling bored and at a loose end, he called round on a former school friend, the young painter with whom he had shared lodgings for a long time. The artist was working on a painting which he intended to submit to the annual Salon,* showing a nude Bacchante stretched out on a piece of drapery. At one end of the studio a model was lying with her head tilted back, her upper body twisted round, and one hip raised. Occasionally she would laugh, and stretch her arms and thrust out her chest to relieve the stiffness. Laurent, who had sat down opposite her, watched her while he smoked and chatted to his friend. The sight set his heart

thumping and his nerves tingling. He stayed there until the evening, then took the woman home with him. For nearly a year he kept her as his mistress. The poor creature found him a handsome figure of a man and fell in love with him. She went off each morning and posed all day long, then came home at the same time each evening. She paid for her own food, clothes, and upkeep with the money she earned, and so did not cost Laurent a penny; he was not the slightest bit concerned about where she came from or what she had been doing. She brought an added element of balance into his life; he accepted her as a useful, necessary object which helped keep his body relaxed and healthy. He never knew whether he loved her, and the idea that he was being unfaithful to Thérèse never crossed his mind. He felt fatter and happier. That was all.

Meanwhile, Thérèse had come out of mourning. She was now wearing light-coloured dresses, and one evening it so happened that Laurent found her younger and prettier-looking. But he still felt slightly ill at ease in her company, and for some time now she had seemed to him over-excitable and strangely capricious, bursting into laughter or tears for no reason. Her vacillating moods scared him, because he could guess something of the struggles and storms going on within her. He began to hesitate, filled with an awful fear of compromising his own equanimity; he was living a peaceful life and satisfying his appetites sensibly, and was afraid of putting this balanced existence at risk by getting involved once more with a nervy woman whose passionate nature had already driven him to distraction. Not that he thought this through rationally, but he was instinctively aware of the upheaval that possessing Thérèse would inevitably create.

The first thing which jolted him out of his lethargy was the thought that the time had finally come to think about his marriage, as Camille had now been dead for almost fifteen months. For a moment he considered not getting married at all, but jilting Thérèse and keeping the model instead, since her compliant and inexpensive affection was all he needed. But then he told himself that it would be absurd to have killed a man for nothing; and, as he remembered the crime and the terrible efforts he had made to gain sole possession of this

woman who now so disturbed him, he felt that the murder would become pointless and abhorrent if he did not go ahead and marry her. The idea of pushing a man into the river so as to make off with his widow, waiting fifteen months, and then deciding instead to live with a little tart who touted her body around artists' studios, seemed so ridiculous it made him smile. Anyway, was he not tied to Thérèse by a bond of blood and terror? He could dimly feel her crying out and writhing inside him; he belonged to her. Besides, he was also afraid of his accomplice; if he did not marry her, perhaps she would go and tell everything to the courts, out of jealousy and revenge. These ideas made his head throb and caused his fever to return.

At this juncture the model suddenly walked out on him. One Sunday she failed to return home, doubtless having found a warmer and more comfortable nest elsewhere. Laurent was moderately distressed; he had got used to having a woman lying by his side at night, and he felt a sudden gap in his life. A week later his nerves could stand it no longer. He took once more to installing himself for whole evenings at a time in the shop in the arcade, and looking at Thérèse with an occasional glint in his eye. The young woman, still quivering from her long hours of reading, took on a languid and provocative air beneath his gaze.

And so, after a long year of waiting filled with distaste and indifference, they both found themselves afflicted once more by the torment of desire. One evening, as he was shutting up the shop, Laurent held Thérèse back in the arcade.

'Would you like me to come up to your room this evening?' he asked passionately.

She threw up her hands in horror.

'No, no, let's wait,' she said. 'We must be careful.'

'It seems to me I've already waited long enough,' said Laurent; 'I'm tired of it, I want you now.'

Thérèse gave him a wild look; her hands and face were on fire. She seemed to hesitate, then said abruptly:

'Let's get married, then I'll be yours.'

XVII

As he left the arcade, Laurent's mind was on edge and his body tense. Thérèse's warm breath, her compliance, had brought back his desires with all their former keenness. He walked along the embankment with his hat in his hand, so he could feel the fresh breeze full on his face.

When he arrived at the door of his lodging-house in the Rue Saint-Victor he suddenly felt afraid of going upstairs and being alone. He was overcome by a childish dread, inexplicable and entirely unexpected, that there might be a man hiding in his attic room. He had never before been subject to such ridiculous imaginings. He did not even try to reason away the strange shudder which came over him; he went into a bar and stayed there for an hour until midnight, sitting motionless and silent at a table and mechanically downing large glasses of wine. His thoughts turned to Thérèse, and he grew angry with her for not letting him into her room that same evening, for he was sure he would not have been afraid in her company.

Closing time came round and he was thrown out. He went back in to ask for some matches. The lodging-house concierge lived on the first floor, so Laurent had to go down a long alleyway and up a number of stairs before he could pick up his candle. The awful darkness in the alley and on the stairs filled him with dread. Normally, he would have crossed this dark area quite light-heartedly. That evening he did not dare ring the bell, telling himself that behind a certain projection by the cellar entrance there might be murderers lurking who would leap at his throat as he went by. In the end, though, he did ring, then lit a match, and made up his mind to venture into the passage. The match went out. He stood stock still, panting, not daring to run away, scraping matches against the damp wall with such panic that his hand shook. He thought he heard voices and footsteps ahead of him. The matches kept snapping in his fingers. He managed to light one. The sulphur started sizzling, setting light to the wood so slowly that it further

increased Laurent's alarm; in the flickering shadows cast by the sulphur's pale, bluish glow he thought he could make out monstrous shapes. Then the match caught, and the light became white and much brighter. Greatly relieved, he went cautiously forward, taking care that the match did not go out. When he had to pass by the cellar, he squeezed up against the opposite wall, for there was a pool of shadow there that scared him. Then he scurried up the few stairs which lay between him and the concierge's office, and only when he finally had the candle in his hand did he feel safe. He took his time climbing the rest of the stairs, holding the candle aloft and lighting up all the corners by which he had to pass. The huge, weirdly-shaped shadows, like those which always flit to and fro around anybody carrying a lamp up a staircase, filled him with vague apprehension as they loomed up in front of him, then vanished.

When he arrived at the top of the building, he opened his door and quickly locked himself in. The first thing he did was to look under the bed and give the room a minute inspection, to make sure there was no one hiding in it. He shut the skylight in case anyone should come in that way. Once he had taken these precautions he started to relax, and, as he undressed, he began to be astonished at his own cowardice. Eventually he smiled and told himself he was being childish. He had never been the timorous type and he could not understand this sudden attack of panic.

He went to bed. Once he had got warm between the sheets, his thoughts turned again to Thérèse, whom his fright had made him forget. With his eyes obstinately closed he tried to go to sleep, but his mind began working despite himself, and thoughts took shape and linked themselves together, all showing him how advantageous it would be to him to get married as soon as possible. Now and again he would turn over and say to himself: 'Let's not think about it any more, and go to sleep; I have to get up at eight tomorrow to go to work,' before making another effort to drift off into sleep. But the ideas came back one by one, the hidden reasoning processes started up again, and he soon found himself back in a state of agitated musing which filled his brain with the necessity of getting married, and with all the arguments which

his lust and his caution by turns could advance for and against his possessing Thérèse.

Then, when he realized that he could not sleep and that insomnia was keeping his body in an excited state, he turned on to his back, opened his eyes wide, and allowed the memory of her to come flooding into his mind. All equanimity was now lost and he was once more in the grip of the feverish imaginings of days gone by. It occurred to him to get up and go back to the Passage du Pont-Neuf. He would get them to open the gate, go and knock at the side door at the bottom of the stairs, and Thérèse would let him in. At this thought, he felt the blood rush to his neck.

His daydream was astonishingly real. He saw himself walking quickly along various streets, past all the houses, and thought to himself: 'I'll go down this boulevard and across that crossroads, to get there quicker.' Then the gate of the arcade squeaked open and he was walking down the narrow gallery, which was dark and deserted, congratulating himself on being able to go up to Thérèse's room without being seen by the woman who sold costume jewellery. Then he imagined himself in the side passage, going up the narrow stairs as he had done so often in the past. There he felt the same fierce thrill as before, as he remembered all the delicious terrors and the bitter-sweet sensuality of adultery. His memories became realities that impinged directly on all his senses: he could smell the musty reek of the corridor, touch the damp walls, and see the murky gloom which hung everywhere. And he climbed each step, panting and listening intently, beginning already to indulge his lustful fantasies as he timorously approached the woman he desired. Finally, he scratched gently at the door, it opened, and Thérèse was standing there waiting for him, all white in her petticoats.

His imaginings unfolded before him like real events, and as he stared into the darkness he could see everything. When, after racing though the streets, going into the arcade, and climbing the back stairs, he believed he really did see Thérèse, pale and burning with passion, he leaped straight out of bed, muttering: 'I must go, she's waiting for me.' His sudden movement drove away the hallucination; he felt the cold of the floor-tiles and was afraid. He stood still for a while, barefoot, listening. He

thought he heard a noise on the landing outside. If he went round to see Thérèse, he would have to go back down past the cellar door; the idea sent a great shiver down his spine. He was overcome once more by dread, an unthinking, overwhelming terror. He looked suspiciously around his room at all the whitish streaks of light, then, quietly but with anxious and hasty precautions, climbed back into bed, where he pulled the covers up over himself and hid from view, as if taking refuge from a knife or some other threatening weapon.

The blood had rushed violently to his neck, which was now burning, and when he touched it he could feel beneath his fingers the scar left by Camille's bite. He had almost forgotten about it; now, when he rediscovered it there on his skin, he was terrified by the feeling that it was eating into his flesh. He had drawn his hand away quickly to avoid touching it, but he could still feel it devouring him, burning a hole in his neck. So he tried to scratch it gently with the tip of a nail; the terrible burning sensation was redoubled. To prevent himself from clawing at his own skin he squeezed both hands tightly between his drawn-up knees. And there he lay, rigid, his nerves on edge, with this gnawing in his neck and his teeth chattering in fear.

Now his thoughts became terrifyingly fixed on Camille. Until then, Laurent's nights had not been disturbed by the drowned man. Now, the thought of Thérèse had ushered in the ghost of her husband. The murderer no longer dared open his eyes for fear of catching sight of his victim in some corner of the bedroom. At one point his bed felt strangely as if it were shaking, and he imagined that Camille was hiding underneath, jerking it up and down and trying to shake him out in order to bite him. Wild-eyed and with his hair standing on end, he clung to his mattress as the shaking grew more and more violent.

Then he realized that the bed was not shaking at all. Relief flooded over him. He sat up, lit his candle, and called himself a fool. To calm his feverish panic he swallowed a large glass of water.

'I shouldn't have stopped off in that bar for a drink,' he thought to himself. 'I don't know what's the matter with me tonight. It's stupid, I'll be flaked out tomorrow at work.

I should have got into bed and gone straight to sleep, instead of turning all sorts of things over in my head; that's what kept me awake . . . Anyway, I'll go to sleep now.'

He blew the light out once more and buried his head in the pillow, feeling a little better and determined not to think about anything else, and to stop being afraid. His nerves were beginning to unwind with fatigue.

He did not sleep his usual deep, heavy sleep, but slipped slowly into a vague drowsiness as if he were merely numbed, drifting into a gentle, delectable insensibility. As he dozed he could still feel his body, and his mind remained awake in his deadened flesh. He had chased away the thoughts that had come into his head, and struggled against wakefulness, but when he dropped off and his strength and will-power deserted him, the thoughts slipped back one by one and took possession again of his drifting mind. Then the dreams began afresh. He retraced the path that separated him from Thérèse; he ran down the stairs, past the cellar and out into the open, then along all the same streets as before when he had been dreaming with his eyes open, into the Passage du Pont-Neuf and up the back stairs, until he scratched at the door. But instead of Thérèse, instead of the young woman in her underwear, with her breasts uncovered, it was Camille who opened the door, Camille as he had seen him at the Morgue, greenish and horribly disfigured. The corpse opened its arms to him with a horrible laugh, poking the tip of its blackened tongue out between white teeth.

Laurent screamed and woke up with a start, covered in a cold sweat. He pulled the bedclothes up over his eyes, swearing angrily at himself, and tried to go back to sleep.

He dropped off again as slowly as before. The same heaviness overcame him, and, as soon as his will-power had slipped away in his torpid, semi-conscious state, he started running back to where his obsession led him, to Thérèse, and once again it was the drowned man who opened the door.

Terrified and miserable, Laurent sat up again in bed. He would have given anything in the world to drive away this implacable dream, and wished he could fall into a leaden slumber that would obliterate all his thoughts. While he was awake he had sufficient energy to ward off his victim's ghost, but,

as soon as he lost control over his mind, it took him off down a path of erotic imaginings which led to sheer terror.

He made another attempt to sleep, falling into a succession of delicious dozes followed by sudden and painful awakenings. In his furious stubbornness he was constantly rushing towards Thérèse, only to come up against the corpse of Camille. More than ten times he made the same journey, setting off with his flesh on fire, following the same route with minute exactness, feeling the same sensations and performing the same actions, and more than ten times he saw the drowned man offer himself to his embrace when he opened his arms to clasp his mistress to him. This same sinister outcome which woke him up every time, panting and desperate, did not discourage his desire; a few minutes later, as soon as he had fallen asleep again, his lust would forget the repulsive corpse which awaited it and set off once more in search of a woman's warm, lithe body. For an hour Laurent experienced this sequence of nightmares, constantly repeated but always unexpected, which jolted him awake with more acute horror each time.

One such jolt, the last, was so violent and painful that he decided to get up and abandon the struggle. Dawn was approaching and a dismal grey light was coming in through the skylight, which now marked out a whitish, ashen-coloured square of sky.

Laurent dressed slowly and with sullen irritation. He was exasperated at not having slept and at having allowed himself to fall prey to a terror which he now told himself was mere childish stupidity. As he was climbing into his trousers he stretched, rubbed his limbs, and ran his hands over a face which was drawn and puffy from the feverish night he had spent. And he kept telling himself:

'I really shouldn't have been thinking about all those things; I could have gone to sleep and been fresh and wide awake now ... Oh! If only Thérèse had been willing, last night, if only she had slept with me ... '

This idea that Thérèse would have prevented him from being afraid calmed him a little, but what he dreaded most was having to endure other nights like the one he had just been through.

He splashed his face with water and gave his hair a comb. This summary toilet cleared his head and saw off the last of

his fears. He began to think cogently, though he still felt a great weariness in his limbs.

'But I'm no coward', he told himself as he finished dressing, 'and I couldn't give a damn about Camille ... It's ridiculous to believe the poor wretch is under my bed; I might start thinking that every night. I really must hurry up and get married. With Thérèse holding me in her arms I shan't have any further thoughts of Camille. She'll kiss my neck and I won't feel the dreadful burning any more. Now, let's just have a look at that bite.'

He went over to his mirror, stuck out his chin, and scrutinized his neck. The scar was light pink. As he made out his victim's tooth-marks, Laurent felt a twinge of anxiety, the blood rushed to his head, and he noticed something strange happening. The rising blood turned the scar a vivid crimson colour, making it stand out starkly against his fleshy white neck. At the same time he felt a sharp pricking sensation, as if needles were being stuck into the wound. He quickly pulled his shirt collar back up.

'Never mind!' he thought to himself, 'Thérèse will make it better. A few kisses will do the trick. What a fool I am to think about things like that!'

He put on his hat and went downstairs. He needed fresh air, and a good walk. As he passed in front of the cellar door he smiled, although he did check that the hook which secured it was firmly in place. Once he was outside he walked slowly along the deserted pavements in the cool morning air. It was about five o'clock.

Laurent had a terrible day. He had to struggle against an overwhelming urge to sleep which came over him at the office during the afternoon. His heavy, throbbing head would begin to nod despite himself, and he would jerk upright again whenever he heard the approaching footsteps of one of his superiors. This struggle, and the repeated disturbance, left his limbs more tired than ever, and filled him with intolerable stress.

That evening, despite his tiredness, he was determined to go and see Thérèse. He found her in a feverish, downcast state, and worn out like himself.

'Poor Thérèse has had a bad night,' Madame Raquin told him after he had sat down. 'She seems to have had nightmares,

and terrible trouble getting back to sleep. I heard her cry out several times. This morning she was not at all well.'

While her aunt was speaking, Thérèse stared hard at Laurent. They probably each guessed what terrors the other had been through, for the same nervous tremor ran over both their faces. They remained sitting opposite each other until ten o'clock, making banal conversation but reading each other's thoughts and imploring each other with their eyes to hasten the moment when they could unite against the drowned man.

XVIII

THÉRÈSE too had been visited by the ghost of Camille during that feverish night.

Laurent's burning plea for a meeting, after more than a year of indifference, had suddenly whipped up her feelings afresh. As she lay alone in bed, her body had begun to tingle at the thought that their marriage would soon take place. Then, as she tossed in insomnia, she had seen the drowned man standing before her; like Laurent, she had been racked by a mixture of terror and desire and, like him, had told herself that she would not be afraid any more, or feel such pain, when she could hold her lover in her arms once again.

At exactly the same time, this woman and this man had both experienced a sort of nervous crisis which threw them back, gasping and terrified, into their monstrous love-affair. A relationship of blood and lust had grown up between them. They both shuddered the same shudders; their hearts, linked by an agonizing fraternity, trembled at the same terrors. They now had but one body and one soul with which to feel pleasure and pain. This common bond, this mutual inter-linking, is a psychological and physiological fact which can often be observed in people thrown violently together by severe nervous shocks.

For more than a year Thérèse and Laurent had borne lightly the chain that bound their limbs to each other with equanimity. In the period of numbness that had come after the acute crisis of the murder, in the feelings of repugnance and the need for peace and forgetfulness which had then followed, these two prisoners had been able to imagine themselves free, no longer linked together by an iron bond. The chain had hung slack on the ground while they rested, and they had fallen into a contented stupor and looked around for love elsewhere, trying to lead a sensible and balanced existence. But the day came when, driven by events, they began once more to exchange words of passion, and the chain snapped taut

again, giving them such a jolt that they realized they were now attached to each other for ever.

The very next day Thérèse quietly set to work to bring about her marriage to Laurent. It was a difficult and perilous undertaking. The lovers were terrified of doing anything imprudent and arousing suspicion, of revealing too suddenly why Camille's death had been in their interests. Realizing that they could not mention marriage to anyone, they decided on a most prudent plan which would bring Madame Raquin herself and her Thursday guests to offer them what they did not dare to ask for themselves. All they had to do now was plant the idea of Thérèse getting remarried in the minds of these good people, while making them believe that it had occurred to them first, and was in fact their idea.

It would be a long and delicate piece of play-acting. Thérèse and Laurent had each taken the part that suited them best, and now they moved forward with the utmost care, carefully calculating their slightest gesture or word. In reality they were devoured by an impatience which made them tense and set their nerves on edge. They were living in a state of nervous irritation, and it was only their cowardly fear of the consequences that forced them to appear smiling and calm.

If they were in a hurry to get marriage over with, it was because they could no longer stand being apart and on their own. Every night they were visited by the drowned man, and insomnia laid them on a bed of burning coals, turning them over with red-hot irons. The state of nervous irritation in which they were living still kindled new desires in them each evening, setting atrocious hallucinations before their eyes. Once darkness had fallen, Thérèse no longer dared to go up to her bedroom; she was filled with a dreadful panic whenever she had to stay shut up until morning in that great room, which peopled itself with ghosts and strange gleams of light as soon as she put her candle out. She ended up leaving it lit and preferring not to sleep at all, so that she could keep her eyes wide open. And whenever her eyelids did close with tiredness, she always saw Camille there in the dark and opened them again with a jerk. She would drag herself about the next morning, totally shattered, having slept for only a few hours in the light. As for Laurent, he had become decidedly cowardly

since the night when he had first been afraid of going past the cellar door. Before then he had lived with a kind of brutish self-assurance; now, the slightest noise made him quiver and turn pale, like a little boy. The shudder of terror that had gone through his limbs then had remained with him. At night he was in an even worse state than Thérèse, for fear shook that great soft, cowardly body of his to the core. He would watch the daylight fade with painful apprehension. Several times he decided not to go home at all, and spent the whole night walking round the deserted streets. Once he crouched under a bridge until morning, frozen to death in the pouring rain, not daring to get to his feet and walk back up the embankment, and watched the dirty waters flowing past in the grey shadows for almost six hours; at times, panic made him fling himself flat on the wet ground, as he imagined he could see long lines of drowned bodies drifting down on the current, under the arch. Whenever weariness did drive him back to his lodgings, he would double-lock his door from the inside and lie there until dawn, struggling against terrible bouts of fever. The same nightmare kept recurring time and again, as he imagined he was falling out of the ardent, passionate arms of Thérèse into the chill, clammy arms of Camille; one minute he dreamed that he was being smothered in Thérèse's hot embrace, and the next that he was being clasped to the drowned man's decomposing chest in a glacial hug. This sudden alternation of feelings of lust and loathing, this contact first with a body hot with love, then with cold, slime-softened flesh, left him shivering, gasping for breath, choking in terror.

Every day the lovers' panic grew worse, and every day their nightmares made them more demented and distraught. Their only hope against insomnia was the kisses that they exchanged, but out of prudence they did not dare arrange assignations. So they looked upon their wedding day as their day of salvation, to be followed by a night of bliss.

Thus they anticipated their union with all the desire they felt to sleep peacefully again. During their period of indifference they had hesitated, forgetting the selfish and passionate reasons which had driven them both to commit murder but had then evaporated once the deed was done. Now that they

were once again burning with lust, they rediscovered in the depths of their egotistical passion the reasons which had first made them kill Camille—to enjoy afterwards, as they thought, the pleasures which a legitimate marriage would bring. And yet it was with a vague sense of despair that they took the supreme decision to unite openly. Deep down they were afraid, and their very desire trembled with apprehension. They had, as it were, looked deep into each other's natures, as into a chasm whose horror drew them ever closer to its edge; each peered down into the other's being, clinging on in silence while an intense, delicious sensation of vertigo turned their limbs to water and gave them a crazy urge to plunge into the whirling void. But, faced with present reality, in which waiting was filled with anxiety and desire laden with fear, they felt an urgent need to shut their eyes and dream of a future of amorous bliss and tranquil fulfilment. The more they trembled at the sight of each other, the more clearly they saw the abyss into which they were about to fling themselves, and the more they tried to make themselves happy promises and list the inescapable reasons which were moving them inevitably towards marriage.

Thérèse wanted to marry solely because she was afraid, and her body cried out for the violent caresses of Laurent. She was in the throes of a nervous crisis which had virtually driven her mad. The truth was, she scarcely reasoned at all, but threw herself into her passion with a mind warped by the novels she had read and a body inflamed by the cruel insomnia that had kept her awake for several weeks.

Although Laurent, more stolid in temperament, had also given in to his terror and his desires, he still intended to make his decision a reasoned one. In order to prove to himself that his marriage was a necessity and that he was finally going to be completely happy, and to dispel the vague fears that assailed him, he now went back over all his earlier calculations. As his father, the peasant from Jeufosse, was stubbornly refusing to die, he told himself that his inheritance could still be a long time in coming, and even began to fear that it might escape him entirely and disappear into the pockets of one of his cousins, a strapping lad who still tilled the soil, much to the approval of Laurent's father. Then he would stay poor for ever,

living in a garret with no wife, sleeping badly, and eating still worse. Nor did he plan on working for the rest of his days; he was beginning to get dreadfully weary of his office, and even the light work that had been entrusted to him was becoming too much for his lazy nature. The outcome of his reflections was always that perfect happiness consisted in doing nothing. Then he remembered that he had drowned Camille in order to marry Thérèse and be able to do nothing thereafter. No doubt the desire to possess his mistress all for himself had played a large part in his thoughts of crime, but he had perhaps been led to commit the murder even more by the hope of taking Camille's place, of being looked after like him and enjoying a state of permanent bliss. If he had been driven by passion alone he would not have acted with such cowardly prudence. The truth was that he had sought by murder to ensure for himself a calm life of idleness, and the lasting satisfaction of his appetites. All these thoughts, whether explicit or unconscious, now came back to him. To keep up his spirits he kept telling himself that the time had come to profit from Camille's death in the way he had expected. And he listed for himself all the advantages and delights of his future existence: he would leave his job and live in delicious idleness; he would eat, drink, and sleep his fill; he would always have a passionate woman on hand to restore the balance of his blood and his nerves; he would soon inherit forty-odd thousand francs from Madame Raquin, for the poor old girl was now declining by the day; in short, he would make a life of animal satisfactions for himself and forget everything else. Laurent had gone over all this many times since the two of them had decided on marriage; he kept searching his mind for still more advantages and was over the moon whenever he thought he had found, in the depths of his selfishness, a new argument for marrying the drowned man's widow. But however hard he pushed himself to hope, however much he dreamed of a fat future of idleness and pleasure, sudden shivers still chilled his skin and he still had, at times, a feeling of dread that stifled the joy in his throat.

XIX

MEANWHILE, the secret efforts of Thérèse and Laurent were beginning to bear fruit. Thérèse had put on a glum, despairing expression which began to worry Madame Raquin after several days. The old haberdasher demanded to know what was making her niece so sad. So the young woman played her part as inconsolable widow with consummate expertise, talking in vague terms of lassitude, depression, and nervous pains, without going into details. When her aunt pressed her with questions, she replied that she was quite well and had no idea why she was feeling so downcast, and did not know what was making her cry. She sighed tearfully the whole time, with wan, sorrowful smiles that gave way to silences heavy with emptiness and despair. Seeing this young woman turned in on herself and apparently wasting away with some unknown ailment finally made Madame Raquin seriously alarmed. She had no one left in the world but her niece, and every evening she prayed God to safeguard her child so that there would be someone to close her eyes when she died. This last love of her old age was therefore mixed with a little selfishness. Once it occurred to her that she might lose Thérèse and have to die all alone in that dank shop in the arcade, she felt that all the slight consolations which had helped her to go on living were suddenly under threat. From then on she never took her eyes off her niece, anxiously studying her airs of sadness and wondering what on earth she could do to cure her of this silent despair.

In circumstances of such gravity she thought she should ask the advice of her old friend Michaud. One Thursday evening she kept him back in the shop and told him her fears.

'It's obvious,' the old fellow replied with the brutal frankness of his former profession; 'I've noticed for some time now that Thérèse has been moping and looking miserable, with that sallow complexion of hers, and I know exactly why.'

'You do?' said Madame Raquin. 'Quick, tell me. If we can only cure her!'

'Oh, the remedy's easy enough,' Michaud continued with a laugh. 'Your niece is fed up because she has been alone at night in her room for close on two years now. She needs a husband, you can see it in her eyes.'

The former superintendent's harsh directness was hurtful to Madame Raquin. She had thought that the deep wound in her which had not ceased bleeding since the dreadful accident at Saint-Ouen must be just as raw, just as cruel, in the heart of the young widow. With her son dead, she felt that there could never be another husband for her niece. Now here was Michaud claiming, with his vulgar laugh, that Thérèse was sickening for a husband.

'Marry her off as soon as you can,' he said as he departed, 'if you don't want her to wither away altogether. That's my view, dear lady, and it's the right one, believe you me.'

At first, Madame Raquin could not get used to the idea that her son had already been forgotten. Old Michaud had not even spoken Camille's name, and he had joked about Thérèse's so-called illness. The unfortunate mother realized that she alone was keeping alive, in the depths of her being, the memory of her dear child. She burst into tears, and it seemed to her that Camille had just died a second time. Then, when she had had a good cry and tired herself out with grief, she began despite herself to think about what Michaud had said, and grew used to the idea of buying a little happiness at the cost of a marriage which, by going against the scruples of her memory, would amount to killing her son all over again. Cowardly impulses overcame her whenever she found herself alone in front of Thérèse, gloomy and downcast, in the glacial silence of the shop. She was not one of those rigid, emotionless individuals who take a perverse pleasure in living in perpetual despair; with the effusive temperament of a nice, affable old lady, she had enough flexibility of mind and commitment to others to want to live a life of active kindness. Since her niece had stopped speaking and was just standing around looking pale and feeble, her existence had become intolerable and the shop had begun to seem like a tomb; she would have liked to be surrounded by life and warmth, caresses and affection, and a gentle, happy atmosphere which would help her to await the coming of death in peace. These unconscious wishes led

her to accept the idea of Thérèse getting married again; she even forgot her son a little, and a kind of reawakening came about in the deathly existence she had been leading, with a new will to do things and fresh occupations for her mind. Her head now became filled with the need to find a husband for her niece. The poor old woman took this search very seriously indeed, for she was thinking even more of herself than of Thérèse; she intended to marry her off in such a way that she herself would be happy, for she very much feared that the young woman's new husband might come along and upset the last days of her old age. The thought of bringing a stranger into her everyday existence terrified her, and this was the only thing that held her back from speaking openly to her niece on the subject.

While Thérèse was acting out her comedy of listlessness and depression with the perfect hypocrisy that her upbringing had given her, Laurent took the part of the sensitive and obliging man about the house. He was full of little kindnesses for the two women, especially Madame Raquin, on whom he showered delicate attentions. Gradually he made himself indispensable in the shop, and he was the only one to bring a bit of cheerfulness into that dark hole. Whenever he was not there, in the evenings, the old haberdasher would cast about uneasily as if there were something missing, almost afraid of having to face Thérèse and her miseries on her own. In fact, Laurent only ever stayed away for an evening in order to reinforce his position of power; normally, he would come round to the shop from the office every day, and stay until the arcade was locked up for the night. He would run errands and bring Madame Raquin various little things that she needed, for she could only walk with difficulty. Then he would sit down and make conversation. He had discovered a stage voice, quiet but penetrating, which he used to charm the ears and heart of the dear old lady. Above all, he seemed most solicitous about Thérèse's state of health, as a friend and a sensitive soul distressed by the pain of others. Several times he took Madame Raquin to one side and terrified her by appearing frightened himself of the alterations and ravages which he said he could see in the young woman's face.

'We shall lose her before long,' he murmured in a tearful

voice. 'It's no good pretending to ourselves that she isn't seriously ill. Alas for our poor bit of happiness, and our lovely quiet evenings!'

Madame Raquin listened anxiously to what he was saying. Laurent even carried his audacity so far as to talk about Camille.

'You see,' he went on, 'my poor friend's death was a terrible blow to her. She has been wasting away for the last two years, since the tragic day when she lost Camille. Nothing can console her, nothing can cure her now. We must just resign ourselves.'

These impudent lies made the old lady shed hot tears. Her son's memory upset her and blinded her to what was going on. Whenever someone spoke the name of Camille she would burst out sobbing, and so abandon herself to her grief that she could have hugged the person who had used her poor child's name. Laurent had noticed the unsettling effect that this name had on her, and so he was able to make her cry at will and overwhelm her with feelings that stopped her seeing things clearly; he exploited this power in order to keep her grief-stricken and compliant in his hands. Each evening, however much it sickened him, he brought the conversation round to the rare qualities of Camille, his tender heart and fine mind, and sang his victim's praises with complete cynicism. From time to time, when his eyes caught those of Thérèse staring at him in an odd way, he shuddered, realizing that he was beginning to believe all the good things he was saying about the drowned man; then he would stop talking, suddenly overcome with intense jealousy and dread that the young widow might actually love the man he had thrown into the water, and was now praising with such hallucinatory conviction. Throughout the whole conversation Madame Raquin would be in floods of tears, completely oblivious to her surroundings. While she cried, she thought what a loving, generous soul Laurent was, for he alone remembered her son, and he alone still spoke about him in a voice trembling with emotion. As she dried her eyes, she would look at the young man with unstinting affection, loving him like her own son.

One Thursday evening Michaud and Grivet were already in the dining-room when Laurent entered, went over to Thérèse, and asked her, with gentle concern, about her health.

He sat down for a while at her side, acting his part as the affectionate and worried friend for the benefit of those present. As the two young people were sitting together and exchanging a few words, Michaud, who was watching them, leaned over and whispered to the old haberdasher, pointing at Laurent:

'Look, that's the husband your niece needs. Fix the marriage up as quick as you can. We'll help, if needs be.'

Michaud's face wore a knowing smile, for he considered that what Thérèse needed was a powerful man for a husband. Madame Raquin was struck as it were by a sudden illumination, seeing in a flash everything that she herself stood to gain from the marriage of Thérèse and Laurent. It would only serve to strengthen the ties which already linked herself and her niece to that kind-hearted fellow who always came round to cheer them up of an evening. It would also avoid introducing a stranger into her house, so that there would be no risk of upsetting her—quite the opposite, in fact, for, at the same time as providing Thérèse with support, it would bring an additional joy to her old age, as this young man who had treated her with filial affection for the last three years would now be a second son to her. Then she began to think that marrying Laurent would make Thérèse less unfaithful to the memory of Camille. Such are the strange niceties of judgement to which religions of the heart are prone. Madame Raquin, who would have wept to see a stranger kissing the young widow, felt no inner repugnance at the thought of handing her over to the embraces of her son's former best friend. She felt, as the saying goes, that it would be keeping things in the family.

All that evening, while the guests played dominoes, the old haberdasher cast such tender glances at the young couple that he and she both guessed their play-acting had worked and was about to reach its intended conclusion. Before leaving, Michaud had a short talk in undertones with Madame Raquin; then he ostentatiously took Laurent by the arm and declared that he would accompany him a little way home. As he went out, Laurent exchanged a rapid glance with Thérèse, a glance heavy with meaning.

Michaud had taken it upon himself to sound Laurent out. He found him most devoted to the two ladies and extremely

surprised at any notion of a marriage between Thérèse and himself. Laurent added in an emotional voice that he loved his poor friend's widow like a sister, and would feel he was committing an act of real sacrilege if he were to marry her. The former police superintendent pressed his case, putting forward a hundred good reasons why Laurent should give his consent, appealing to his dedication and even going so far as to say that his duty required him to give Madame Raquin another son, and Thérèse another husband. Gradually, Laurent allowed himself to be talked round; he pretended to be giving in to his emotions and accepting the idea of marriage as a sudden inspiration from above, dictated by thoughts of duty and devotion, as old Michaud had put it. When Michaud had obtained a definite acceptance, he parted from his companion, rubbing his hands at the thought that he had just achieved a great victory, and congratulating himself for having been the first to think of a marriage which would put all the zest back into their Thursday evening gatherings.

While Michaud strolled along the embankment chatting with Laurent, Madame Raquin was having an almost identical conversation with Thérèse. When her niece, as pale and frail-looking as ever, was about to retire for the night, the old lady kept her back for a while. She questioned her in affectionate tones, begging her to answer honestly and tell her why it was that she was so very depressed. Then, having received only vague answers, she started talking about the emptiness of a widow's life, gradually working her way round to mentioning the possibility of a new marriage, until in the end she asked Thérèse straight out whether she did not secretly want to marry again. Thérèse threw up her arms in horror, saying that nothing was further from her mind, and that she would always stay faithful to Camille. Madame Raquin burst into tears. Pleading against the instincts of her own heart, she tried to convince Thérèse that despair could not go on for ever, and finally, when the young woman exclaimed that she could never, ever replace Camille, she responded by suddenly pronouncing Laurent's name. Then she burst into a torrent of arguments about the suitability and the advantages of such a union, repeating aloud all the things that had been on her mind during the evening and painting, with unthinking selfishness, a picture

of the happiness of her final years, with her two dear children by her side. Thérèse listened with head bowed, resigned, docile, and more than ready to satisfy her wishes.

'I love Laurent like a brother,' she said in anguished tones when her aunt had fallen silent. 'Since it is your wish, I shall try to love him like a husband. I want to make you happy ... I had been hoping you would leave me to cry in peace, but I'll dry my eyes for the sake of your happiness.'

She kissed the old lady, who was overcome with astonishment at having been the first to forget her son. As she got ready for bed, Madame Raquin sobbed bitterly, reproaching herself for being less strong than Thérèse and wanting for purely selfish reasons a marriage which the young widow was accepting out of pure abnegation.

The next morning Michaud and his old friend had a brief conversation in the arcade, outside the shop door. They informed each other of the success of their schemes and agreed to push straight ahead with their plan and force the young pair into an engagement the same evening.

When Laurent came into the shop that evening at five, Michaud was already there. As soon as the young man had sat down, the former superintendent whispered in his ear:

'She accepts!'

This blunt announcement was heard by Thérèse, who remained pale but kept her gaze imprudently fixed on Laurent The two lovers looked hard at each other for a few seconds, as if to ask each other's advice. They both realized at once that they had to accept the situation without hesitating, and finish the whole thing once and for all. Standing up, Laurent went over and took the hand of Madame Raquin, who was struggling to hold back her tears.

'Dearest mother,' he said, 'Monsieur Michaud and I discussed your future happiness, yesterday evening. Your children wish to make you happy.'

Hearing herself called 'Dearest mother', the poor old lady could not stop her tears from flowing; she seized Thérèse's hand and placed it in Laurent's, quite unable to speak.

The two lovers felt a shiver go through them as their skin touched. They kept their fingers tightly intertwined in a burning, nervous embrace. Laurent went on hesitantly:

'Thérèse, do you wish us to make your aunt's existence a happy and peaceful one?'

'Yes,' she replied in a weak voice, 'we must fulfil our duty.'

Then, very pale, he turned to Madame Raquin and added:

'When Camille fell into the water, he screamed to me: "Save my wife, I place her in your care." I believe that by marrying Thérèse I shall be carrying out his last wish.'

On hearing these words, Thérèse let go of Laurent's hand. It was as if she had received a blow to the heart. She was stunned by her lover's effrontery, and stared dazedly at him while Madame Raquin managed to stammer through her tears:

'Yes, yes, my friend, do marry her and make her happy; my son will thank you from the depths of his grave.'

Laurent felt himself wilting, and went to lean against the back of a chair. Michaud, who was also moved to tears, pushed him towards Thérèse with the words:

'Kiss each other, to mark your engagement.'

As his lips touched the widow's cheeks, the young man was filled with a strange uneasiness, and she recoiled as though her lover's two kisses had burned her. It was the first time that he had ever behaved affectionately towards her in front of other people; all the blood rushed to her face and she felt herself go burning red, she who knew nothing of modesty and had never once blushed for shame in all her illicit love-making.

After this moment of crisis, the two murderers could breathe easily again. Their marriage was decided upon, and at last the goal that they had been pursuing for so long was in sight. The details were settled that same evening. On the following Thursday the forthcoming marriage was announced to Grivet, Olivier, and his wife. As he broke the news, a delighted Michaud kept rubbing his hands together and saying:

'It was all my idea, I persuaded them to marry . . . Just you see what a fine couple they'll make!'

Suzanne came up to Thérèse and embraced her in silence. This poor, deathly-pale creature had taken a liking to the cold, reserved young widow, and loved her as a child would, with a sort of respectful awe. Olivier congratulated the aunt and her niece, while Grivet came out with a few *risqué* jokes which were not too well received. In general, the company was thrilled and delighted, and everyone declared that all was for the best;

in fact, they were already imagining themselves at the wedding.

Thérèse and Laurent maintained a prudent and dignified attitude. They acted towards each other with friendly consideration and affection, nothing more, and gave the appearance of performing an act of supreme devotion to duty. Their expressions gave away nothing of the fears and desires with which they were racked. Madame Raquin looked on at them with wan smiles, full of meek gratitude and benevolence.

There were a few formalities to be completed. Laurent had to write to his father to ask his consent. The old peasant from Jeufosse, who had almost forgotten that he had ever had a son in Paris, sent a four-line reply saying that he could marry and be hanged if he wished, and making it clear that, although he was determined Laurent would never get a penny from him, he was leaving him free to do what he wanted with his person and make whatever idiotic mistakes he thought fit. Laurent was very worried by the tone of this permission.

Madame Raquin, after reading this unnatural father's letter, had a kindly impulse which led her into a foolish mistake. She made over to her niece her capital of more than forty thousand francs, thereby giving everything away to the young couple and leaving herself with nothing; she was entrusting herself to their generosity, for she wanted her whole happiness to depend on them alone. Laurent was to contribute nothing to their joint finances, and even let it be understood that he would not continue in his job for ever, but might go back to painting. However, the future of the little family seemed assured; the income from the forty thousand francs or so, added to the profits from the haberdashery business, should easily provide for three people. There would be just enough for them to be happy.

The wedding preparations were speeded up and the formalities cut to a minimum. It was as if everyone were in a hurry to push Laurent into Thérèse's bedroom. And so the longed-for day finally arrived.

XX

THAT morning Laurent and Thérèse both awoke, in their separate rooms, with the same deeply joyful thought, that their last night of terror was over. No more sleeping on their own; from now on, they could defend each other against the drowned man.

Thérèse looked around her and smiled at the size of her double bed. Then she got up and dressed slowly, waiting for Suzanne to come and help her with her wedding dress.

Laurent sat up in bed and stayed there for a few minutes, taking his leave of the attic which he found so abhorrent. He was going to get out of this kennel at long last, and have a wife of his own. It was December and he started shivering, but as he leapt out on to the tiled floor, he told himself that he would be warm enough that evening.

The previous week Madame Raquin, knowing how hard up he was, had slipped into his hand a purse containing five hundred francs, her whole savings. He had felt no scruples about accepting it and had bought himself a complete new outfit. On top of this, the old haberdasher's money had allowed him to give Thérèse all the customary presents.

His black trousers and tail-coat, as well as his white waistcoat, shirt, and silk tie, were laid out on two chairs. Laurent washed using plenty of soap, and sprayed himself with Eau de Cologne, then started to dress with minute care. He wanted to look handsome. As he was attaching his collar, which was tall and stiff, he felt a most painful sensation in his neck; his fingers fumbled with the collar stud and he began to grow impatient, as the starched linen felt as if it were cutting into his flesh. Looking to see what was wrong, he raised his chin and saw Camille's bite standing out bright red; the collar had slightly grazed the scar. Laurent pursed his lips and went quite pale; the sight of that blotch discolouring his neck scared him and filled him with anger. He crumpled up the collar and picked out another one, which he put on with all possible

precautions. When he had gone downstairs, his new clothes made him walk stiffly and he did not dare turn his head; his neck felt imprisoned by the stiffened cloth, and, with every movement that he made, a fold pinched the deep wound left by the drowned man's teeth. He could still feel a painfully sharp pricking sensation as he climbed into a cab and went to collect Thérèse, to take her off to the town hall, and then the church.

On the way, he picked up an Orleans Railway employee and old Michaud, who were to act as his witnesses. When they arrived at the shop, everyone was ready; Grivet and Olivier, Thérèse's witnesses, were there, as was Suzanne, gazing at the bride like a little girl who has just dressed her doll. Although she could no longer walk, Madame Raquin insisted on being with her children all the time, so they hoisted her into the carriage and set off.

At the town hall and the church everything passed off satisfactorily. The calm, modest attitude of the couple was noticed and greeted with approval. They spoke the sacramental word 'yes' with a degree of emotion which moved even Grivet himself. They felt as if they were in a dream. But while they sat and knelt peacefully side by side, furious thoughts were raging within them despite themselves, tearing apart their peace of mind. They avoided looking each other in the face. When they got back into the carriage, they felt more like strangers than before.

It had been decided that the dinner would be a family affair, held in a cheap little restaurant up the hill in Belleville.* Only the Michauds and Grivet were invited. While they were waiting for it to turn six, the wedding party drove all round the boulevards;* then they went to the restaurant, where a table had been laid for seven in a little, yellow-painted private room reeking of wine and dust.

The meal was less than jolly, as the couple were in a serious, pensive mood. Since that morning they had been having peculiar sensations which they made no attempt to understand. They had been dazed right from the start by the speed of the formalities, and the ceremony which had just tied them to each other for ever. Then the long ride down the boulevards, which seemed to go on for months, had lulled them into a

state of drowsiness; they had patiently let themselves be carried along through the monotonous streets, looking at the shops and the passers-by with blank eyes, overcome by a numbing lethargy which they tried to shake off with bursts of forced laughter. When they finally entered the restaurant, they felt weighed down by overwhelming fatigue and a growing apathy.

Sitting opposite each other at table, they smiled fixedly, then subsided into oppressed pensiveness; they ate, spoke when spoken to, and moved their limbs automatically, like machines. The same sequence of fleeting thoughts kept breaking through the listless inertia that filled their minds. They were married and it did not feel any different, which they found most strange. In their imagination they were still separated by a gaping chasm, and they wondered from time to time how they could ever cross it. They felt as if they were still in the period before the murder, when a material obstacle still stood between them. Then, suddenly, they remembered they would be sleeping together that very evening, in a few hours time, and looked at each other in amazement, not properly understanding why that should be allowed. They did not feel united; on the contrary, they dreamed that they had been violently separated and flung apart in opposite directions.

When the guests, laughing fatuously, demanded to hear them talk to each other in more intimate tones, to clear the air of any embarrassment, they stammered and blushed bright red, unable to force themselves to act like lovers in front of everyone else.

Waiting had blunted the force of their desire, and the past had ceased to exist. Their violent, erotic appetites had gone, and they had even forgotten the joy they had felt that same morning, the deep joy that had come over them at the thought that from now on they would not be afraid any more. Now they were simply weary and bewildered at everything that was happening to them, and the day's events were going round and round in their heads, monstrous and incomprehensible. So they sat there, smiling and speechless, not expecting or hoping for anything, while in the depths of their despondency a vague but painful anxiety began to grow.

And Laurent, every time he moved his head, felt a burning sensation in his neck, as his collar pinched and cut into the

wound left by Camille's bite. While the mayor was reading out the marriage regulations, while the priest was going on about God, and during every other minute of that long day, he had felt the drowned man's teeth sinking into his skin. At times he imagined there was a rivulet of blood running down his chest and making a red stain on his white waistcoat.

Privately, Madame Raquin was grateful to the couple for their gravity, for any boisterous display of joy would have hurt the poor mother's feelings; to her, her son was there throughout, invisibly handing Thérèse over to the care of Laurent. Grivet's attitude was quite different; he was bored by the wedding and was trying in vain to liven things up, despite warning looks from Michaud and Olivier which glued him to his seat whenever he was thinking of standing up and coming out with something idiotic. However, on one occasion he did manage to get to his feet, to propose a toast:

'To the children of Monsieur and Madame,' he said in a ribald tone of voice.

They could not avoid drinking to that. On hearing Grivet's words, Thérèse and Laurent turned extremely pale. It had never occurred to them that they might have children, and now the thought sent an icy shudder running through them. They nervously clinked glasses and looked hard at each other, surprised and scared at being there together, face to face.

The meal did not last long. The guests wanted to accompany husband and wife back to the nuptial chamber. It was scarcely more than half past nine when the wedding party returned to the shop in the arcade. The costume jewellery woman was still sitting in her cubby-hole, behind the box lined with blue velvet. She looked up out of curiosity and smiled at the newly-weds. They caught her glance, and it terrified them. Perhaps the old woman knew all about their past assignations, and had seen Laurent slipping into the little side-passage.

Thérèse withdrew almost at once to the bedroom with Madame Raquin and Suzanne. The men remained in the dining-room while the bride was made ready for the night. Laurent felt limp and enervated, and not in the least impatient, and listened tolerantly to the vulgar jokes that Michaud and Grivet were able to crack to their hearts' content now that the ladies

were out of the way. When Suzanne and Madame Raquin emerged from the bridal chamber and the old haberdasher told Laurent in emotional tones that his wife was waiting for him, he shuddered and stood still for a moment as if stunned. Then he shook the hands they were holding out to him and went into Thérèse's room, hanging on to the door for support like a man drunk.

XXI

LAURENT closed the door carefully behind him and stayed leaning against it for a while, looking around the room with an anxious, embarrassed expression on his face.

A fire was burning brightly in the grate, casting swathes of dancing yellow light on to the ceiling and walls and illuminating the room with a strong, flickering glow which made the lamp on the table seem feeble by comparison. Madame Raquin had wanted to arrange the room prettily, and it was all perfumed and decked out in white, like a nest for young, innocent love; she had taken particular pleasure in adding a few pieces of lace around the bed and filling the vases on the mantelpiece with great bouquets of roses. The room was full of gentle warmth and lingering scents, and bathed in a calm, soothing atmosphere redolent of relaxed sensuality. From time to time the crackling of the fire broke the silence of trembling anticipation. It was like some delightful wilderness, a warm and sweet-scented hideaway shut off from the bustle of the outside world, one of those secret places which form the perfect background to passion and sensual pleasure, providing the sense of mystery that is their necessary accompaniment.

Thérèse was sitting on a low chair to the right of the fireplace, her chin cupped in her hand, staring fixedly into the flames. She did not look round when Laurent came in. Her lace-trimmed petticoat and bodice stood out stark white in the brilliant light of the fire. The bodice had slipped down, revealing a pink patch of shoulder half hidden by a lock of her black hair.

Laurent moved a few steps forward, without speaking. He took off his tail-coat and jacket. When he was in his shirt-sleeves he looked again at Thérèse, who had not moved. Then he caught sight of her exposed shoulder and bent down, trembling, to press his lips to the piece of bare flesh. But she turned abruptly round, withdrawing her shoulder, and gave Laurent

such a strange look of revulsion and fear that he backed away, disconcerted and ill at ease, as if himself smitten with fear and loathing.

He sat down opposite Thérèse, on the other side of the fireplace, and there they remained, silent and motionless, for a whole five minutes. Now and again jets of reddish flame would shoot forth from the burning wood, casting blood-red reflections over the faces of the murderers.

It was almost two years since the lovers had found themselves in the same bedroom together, without witnesses and able to give themselves up entirely to each other. They had not had a single amorous assignation since the day when Thérèse had come round to the Rue Saint-Victor, bringing with her the idea of murdering Camille. As a prudent calculation they had weaned their bodies off each other, scarcely even allowing themselves an occasional hand-clasp or furtive kiss. After the murder of Camille, when new desires had seized them, they had contained their lust and decided to await their wedding night, promising themselves extraordinary pleasures once they could enjoy them with impunity. Now that the great night had finally arrived, they just sat there face to face, suddenly overcome with panic and unease. They only had to stretch out their arms to fall together in a passionate embrace, but their arms felt limp, as though they were already tired out and satiated with love. The torpor of the day's events weighed more and more heavily on them and they looked at each other without any desire, afraid, embarrassed, and upset at their own frigid, silent behaviour. Thus their passionate dreams had led them into a peculiar situation in which, having succeeded in killing Camille and getting married to each other, all it had taken to cool their ardour to the point of horror and disgust was for Laurent's lips to have brushed against Thérèse's shoulder.

They started desperately searching within themselves for a little of the passion that had burned in their hearts long ago. Their bodies no longer seemed to contain either muscles or nerves, and their embarrassment and worry grew until they became horribly ashamed of just sitting, glum and silent, opposite each other. They wished they could find the strength to throw themselves into a crushing embrace, so as not to

appear complete fools in their own eyes. After all, they belonged to each other, didn't they? They had killed a man and played out a gruesome comedy so as to be free to wallow in constant sensual gratification, and now there they were, sitting stiffly on opposite sides of the fireplace, exhausted, troubled in mind, and utterly lethargic of body. After a while, they both began to feel that such an outcome was just too ridiculously horrible and cruel. So Laurent tried to speak of love and conjure up memories of the past, calling upon his imagination to revive their former tender feelings.

'Thérèse,' he said, leaning over to the young woman, 'do you remember our afternoons in this room ... I used to come in through that door ... Today, I came in through this one here ... We are free now, and we'll be able to love each other in peace.'

He spoke hesitantly and without conviction. Thérèse, hunched up in her low chair, was still staring absently into the flames, not listening. Laurent continued:

'Do you remember that dream of mine? I used to dream I was going to spend a whole night with you, and fall asleep in your arms and be woken in the morning by your kisses. Now I'm going to make the dream come true.'

Thérèse shuddered, as if suprised by a voice muttering in her ear, and turned towards Laurent, on whose face the fire was at that moment casting a reddish glow; at the sight of this bloody visage, a shiver ran through her.

He went on, disconcerted now and even more anxious:

'We have done it, Thérèse, we have removed all the obstacles between us and we belong to each other ... The future is all ours, isn't it? A future full of peace and happiness, and contented love ... Camille isn't there any more ...'

He stopped short, his throat dry, gasping for air, unable to carry on. The name of Camille had come as a blow to Thérèse, hitting her in the pit of her stomach. The two murderers stared dumbfounded at each other, pale and shaking. The yellow light of the fire still danced across the walls and ceiling, a warm scent of roses hung in the air, and the fire crackled away in the silence.

Now their memories had been let loose, the ghost of Camille had been invoked, and it had come to seat itself between the

newly-weds, in front of the blazing fire. Thérèse and Laurent smelt again the same cold, damp stench of the drowned man in the warm air that they were breathing; they both sensed the presence of a corpse there with them, and gazed at each other, not daring to move. Then the whole appalling story of their crime unfolded once more before their mind's eye. The victim's name was enough to bring the past flooding back and force them to relive the anguish of the murder all over again. Without opening their lips they stared at each other, and both experienced the same nightmare and read the start of the same cruel story in each other's eyes. This exchange of terrified looks, and the wordless narrative of the murder which they were about to recount to each other, filled them both with intolerably acute apprehension. With their nerves thus stretched to breaking-point, they were on the verge of screaming and coming to blows. In an attempt to drive away the memories, Laurent wrenched himself out of the terrified fascination that held him transfixed in Thérèse's gaze and moved a few steps away, taking off his boots and putting slippers on; then he went back to sit down by the fireplace and tried to make trivial conversation.

Thérèse understood his intentions and made herself respond to his questions. They chatted about this and that, trying to force themselves to make small talk. Laurent declared that it was hot in the bedroom, and Thérèse replied that nevertheless a draught was coming in under the door to the back stairs; and they both turned towards the little door with a sudden shudder. So Laurent quickly changed the subject, talking about the roses, the fire, and anything else he could see in the room; with a great effort, she found monosyllabic replies to keep the conversation going. They had moved further apart and assumed an air of unconcern; they were trying to forget who they were, and to behave towards each other like strangers thrown together purely by chance.

Yet oddly, despite all their efforts to exchange empty nothings, each could guess the thoughts that the other was hiding beneath the banality of his or her speech. They were quite unable to stop thinking about Camille, and their eyes carried on telling the story from the past as they conversed silently but insistently in glances beneath the aimless conver-

sation they were holding out loud. The occasional words they spoke were meaningless, disconnected, and contradictory, for their whole being was straining towards a silent exchange of terrifying memories. When Laurent spoke of the roses, or the fire, or whatever else, Thérèse understood perfectly that he was reminding her of the struggle in the boat and the muted splash made by Camille, and, whenever she replied to a trivial question with a yes or a no, Laurent understood that she was saying she did or did not remember a particular detail of the crime. And in this way they discussed what was on their minds, with no need of words, and while talking about something else. Moreover, they were not really aware of what they were saying, for they were busy following the train of their secret thoughts, one idea after another; had they suddenly carried on with their confidences aloud, they would have understood perfectly well what each other was talking about. Gradually, this kind of mind-reading, caused by their memory's stubborn insistence on constantly forcing upon them the image of Camille, began to drive them frantic; they realized they could each see what the other was thinking and that, if they did not keep quiet, words would come unbidden into their mouths to name the drowned man and retell the story of the murder out loud. Whereupon they brought the conversation to an end and kept their lips sealed.

But in the dreadful silence that followed, the two murderers still went on conversing about their victim. Each felt as if the other's gaze were piercing his or her flesh with sharp, pointed phrases. Sometimes they thought they heard each other speaking out loud; their senses were becoming distorted, their vision turning into a strange, delicate kind of hearing; they could read each other's faces so clearly that the very thoughts acquired a peculiar, strident sound of their own which shook their organisms to the core. They could not have understood each other better if they had both screamed in heart-rending tones: 'We killed Camille, and his body is still here between us, turning our limbs to ice.' And the terrible confessions went on flowing between them, more visible and resounding than ever, in the calm, damp air of the room.

Laurent and Thérèse had begun communicating their unspoken story to each other by recounting the day of their

first meeting, in the shop. Then other memories had come back one by one, in order; the hours of ecstasy, the moments of hesitation and anger, and the terrible instant of the murder. It was at this point that they had sealed up their lips and stopped their small talk, for fear of suddenly naming Camille without meaning to. Yet their thoughts did not stop there, but took them on through the panic and the fearful waiting that had followed the murder. And so into their minds came thoughts of the drowned man's corpse stretched out on a slab in the Morgue. With one look, Laurent told Thérèse all about the horror he had felt, and Thérèse, pushed beyond endurance and forced by a hand of iron to unseal her lips, suddenly took up the conversation out loud:

'So you saw him at the Morgue?' she asked Laurent, without naming Camille.

Laurent seemed to be expecting this question; he had already been reading it for a while on the young woman's blanched face.

'Yes,' he replied in a choked voice.

A shudder ran through the murderers; they moved closer to the fire and held their hands out to the flames, as if an icy draught had suddenly whistled through the hot room. They remained silent for a while as they huddled there together in the warmth. Then Thérèse continued in an undertone:

'Did he look as though he had suffered much pain?'

Laurent was unable to answer, but made a shocked gesture, as if to ward off some revolting vision. Then he jumped up and went over to the bed, before coming back over to Thérèse with his arms open in a violent gesture.

'Give me a kiss,' he said, stretching out his neck to her.

Thérèse had risen to her feet, looking terribly pale in her night attire, and was leaning back with one elbow on the marble of the fireplace. She looked at Laurent's neck. Amid the white of the flesh she could see a pink blotch, which a rush of blood was now enlarging and turning a fiery red.

'Kiss me, kiss me,' he said again, with his face and neck aflame.

She leaned even further back to avoid kissing him, then, pressing a finger-tip to Camille's bite-mark, she asked her husband:

'What's that? I didn't know you had hurt yourself.'

Thérèse's finger felt as if it were boring a hole in his throat; the contact made him pull away, wincing in pain.

'That,' he stammered, 'it's . . .'

He hesitated, but found he could not lie and had to admit the truth.

'It's Camille; you see, he bit me, in the boat. It's nothing, it's all right now . . . Kiss me, kiss me!'

Then the wretched fellow held out his smarting neck once more. He wanted Thérèse to kiss him on the scar in the hope that it would soothe the thousand stings which were torturing his flesh. Chin held up and neck thrust forward, he offered himself again, but Thérèse, by now almost lying along the fireplace, made a gesture of utter repugnance and cried out in a beseeching voice:

'No, no, not there . . . it's all bloody.'

She slumped down trembling into the low chair and held her head in her hands. Laurent stood there, not knowing what had happened. He lowered his chin and looked uncomprehendingly at Thérèse. Then, all of a sudden, he seized her head between his great hands in an animal-like embrace and forced her lips towards his neck, down on to the bite. He held her head there for a few seconds, crushed against his skin. Thérèse had given up resisting and was emitting muffled moans, unable to breathe against his neck. When she managed to escape from his clutches, she wiped her mouth violently and spat in the fire. She had not said a word.

Ashamed at his brutality, Laurent began to walk slowly up and down between the bed and the window. It was pain alone, that terrible smarting, that had made him demand a kiss from Thérèse, and when her cold lips had pressed against the burning scar the pain had been even greater. This kiss obtained by violence had shattered him; nothing in the world could have made him wish for a second, so painful had the shock been. And as he looked at the woman with whom he was now obliged to live, trembling and hunched up in front of the fire, with her back to him, he told himself over and again that he no longer loved her and she did not love him. For nearly an hour Thérèse sat slumped in her chair while Laurent paced silently up and down. They were each facing up to the

terrifying fact that their passion was now dead, and that in killing Camille they had also killed off their own desire. The fire was slowly dying down, leaving a great mass of glowing embers. The heat in the room had gradually become stifling; the flowers were drooping, thickening the air with their heavy, drowsy scents.

Suddenly Laurent thought he was having a hallucination. As he was turning round to walk back from the window to the bed, he saw Camille in a shadowy corner, between the fireplace and the wardrobe. His victim's face was all green and contorted, just as he had seen it on the slab at the Morgue. He stood there rooted to the spot, weak at the knees, leaning against a piece of furniture. Hearing his low gasp of terror, Thérèse looked up.

'There, over there,' he whimpered.

With arm outstretched, he pointed to the shadowy corner where he could see the ghastly face of Camille. Thérèse, caught up in his fear, ran over and clung to him.

'It's his portrait,' she whispered, as if the painted figure of her former husband could hear her.

'His portrait?' Laurent repeated, his hair by now standing on end.

'Yes, you know, the painting you did of him. My aunt was going to move it into her room today; she must have forgotten to take it down.'

'Of course . . . his portrait . . .'

For some time the murderer did not recognize the canvas. In his fear and confusion, he had forgotten that he himself had drawn the crude features and daubed on the muddy colours which so terrified him now. Panic made him see the painting as it really was, repulsive, ill-composed, and murky, a grimacing death's head on a black background. He was astounded and overwhelmed by the unspeakable ugliness of his own creation; above all there were the two white eyes swimming in their spongy, yellowish sockets which exactly reminded him of the decomposing eyes of the drowned man at the Morgue. He stood there for a while panting for breath, thinking that Thérèse was lying in order to reassure him. Then he made out the frame, and began to calm down.

'Go and take it down,' he said to her in a whisper.

'Oh no! I'm too scared!' she replied with a shudder.

Laurent started shaking again. At times the frame seemed to disappear and he saw only the two white eyes staring hard at him.

'Please,' he begged his wife, 'will you take it down?'

'No, I can't.'

'We'll turn it round to face the wall, then it won't be able to scare us any more.'

The murderer, craven and cringing, pushed Thérèse towards the canvas, hiding behind her to avoid the drowned man's stare. However, she freed herself, so he decided to take the risk himself and went up to the picture with arm raised, fumbling for the hook. But the portrait gave him such a long, repulsive, crushing look that, having tried to out-stare it, Laurent was overwhelmed and forced to admit defeat, backing away and muttering:

'No, you're right, Thérèse, we can't ... Your aunt can take it down tomorrow.'

Head bowed, he resumed his pacing up and down, feeling sure that the portrait was still staring at him, following him around with its eyes. He could not stop himself from casting a furtive glance at the painting now and again, and each time he saw the drowned man's blank, lifeless stare looming out of the shadows. The thought that Camille was there in the corner, spying on him, observing his wedding night, scrutinizing Thérèse and himself, drove him utterly crazy with fear and desperation.

A small thing which would have made anyone else smile caused him to lose his head altogether. As he was by the fireplace, he heard a sort of scratching sound. He turned pale, convinced that it was coming from the portrait and imagining that Camille was getting down from his frame. Then he realized that it was actually coming from the door to the back stairs. He looked at Thérèse, who was again gripped by panic.

'There's someone at the top of the stairs,' he hissed. 'Who could it be, coming in that way?'

She made no reply. Their minds both turned to the drowned man, and an icy sweat broke out on their foreheads. They fled to the far side of the room, expecting the door to fly open and Camille's corpse to fall in onto the floor. As the scratching

continued, louder and more erratic, they imagined their victim tearing at the wood with his nails in an attempt to get in. For almost five minutes they did not dare to move. Then at last there came a miaow, and, as Laurent went over to look, he realized that it was Madame Raquin's tabby cat, which had been shut in the bedroom by mistake and was trying to get out by rattling the door with his claws. François was frightened by Laurent; in a single bound he leapt up on to a chair and, with fur bristling and legs out rigid, he stared straight at his new master with a hard, cruel look in his eye. Laurent did not like cats, and François was close to frightening him, for in this overwrought atmosphere of fear he thought the cat was about to leap at his face to avenge Camille. The creature must know everything; it was thinking thoughts behind its round, strangely dilated eyes. Faced with the fixity of this animal stare, Laurent had to look away. He was on the point of giving François a kick when Thérèse cried out:

'Don't hurt him!'

Her shout affected him strangely and brought an absurd idea into his head.

'Camille has entered that cat's body,' he thought. 'I shall have to kill it . . . It looks so human.'

He did not deliver the kick, for fear of hearing François speak to him with Camille's voice. Then he remembered the jokes Thérèse used to make in the days of their great passion, when the cat had been a witness to all their embraces, and he told himself that the creature knew too much and would have to be thrown out of the window. But he lacked the courage to go through with his plan. François was still ready for battle: with claws out and back arched in annoyance, he followed his enemy's every movement with superb detachment. Laurent was disconcerted by the steely glint in his eye; he hastened to open the door into the dining-room and the cat fled with a high-pitched miaow.

Thérèse had resumed her seat by the hearth, where the fire had now gone out; Laurent went back to pacing up and down between the bed and the window; and thus they waited for dawn. They had no thought of going to bed; the life had quite gone out of their hearts and their bodies, and they had just one desire, to get out of that suffocating room. Being

shut up together and having to breathe the same air made them feel utterly sick; they would have liked someone else there to interrupt their intimacy and rescue them from the cruel embarrassment of being in each other's presence, unable to utter a word and quite incapable of resurrecting their passion. Their prolonged silences, heavy with bitter, despairing recriminations and unspoken accusations, which they could nevertheless hear quite distinctly in the calm air, were a torture to them.

Daylight came at last, dirty and grey, bringing with it a biting chill.

Once the room was filled with pale light, Laurent shivered but felt rather calmer. He looked squarely at Camille's portrait and saw it as it really was, trivial and childish; with a shrug he took it down, thinking how silly he had been. Thérèse stood up and went to unmake the bed, so as to deceive her aunt into thinking they had spent a blissful night together.

'Now look here,' said Laurent brusquely, 'I hope we'll get a bit more sleep tonight. This kind of childishness just can't go on.'

Thérèse gave him a deep, serious look.

'You know', he said, 'I didn't get married for sleepless nights . . . We're behaving like children . . . It's your fault; when you put on your graveyard expression like that, it flusters me. Do try and be a bit more cheerful tonight and not scare me to death.'

He gave a forced laugh, for no particular reason.

'I'll try,' she replied in an undertone.

Such was their wedding night.

XXII

THE nights that followed were even more cruel. The murderers had wanted to be with each other at night to defend themselves against the drowned man, yet, strangely, being together only increased their fear. They became exasperated, got on each other's nerves, went through agonies of appalling terror whenever they exchanged the least word or look. As soon as any sort of conversation began between them, when they were on their own, they would both see red and become quite irrational.

Thérèse's impassive yet highly-strung constitution had had a peculiar effect on Laurent's stolid, sanguine one. Long before, at the time of their great passion, the difference in their temperaments had bound them powerfully together as a couple, establishing a kind of equilibrium between them based on the complementarity of their organisms. He put in something of his sanguine nature, she contributed her nerves, and they lived hand in glove in this way, needing the kisses they exchanged to regulate the mechanism of their being. But now the balance had been disrupted. Thérèse's over-wrought nerves had become dominant, and Laurent suddenly found himself plunged into a state of nervous hypersensitivity; under the passionate influence of his wife, his temperament had gradually become that of a young girl suffering from an acute neurotic condition. It would be interesting to study the changes, determined by circumstances, which sometimes come about in certain organisms; these changes begin in the body but quickly communicate themselves to the brain, and thence to the whole individual.

Before he met Thérèse, Laurent had the typical heavy calm, the prudence and the sanguine approach to life, of a peasant, eating, drinking, and sleeping like an animal. Come what may, throughout his everyday existence he breathed steadily and placidly, and was always satisfied with himself; once he began to run to fat, he lost any sharpness he may have had. Only every once in a while, deep down in his fleshy body, did he

feel any stirrings. But Thérèse had turned these stirrings into horrible convulsions of lust, and caused a nervous system of astonishing sensitivity to develop within this great flabby frame. Laurent, who, before all this, had enjoyed life through his blood rather than his nerves, now developed a far less raw sensuality. At the first kisses from his mistress, a whole new and poignant life of the nerves was revealed to him which increased his erotic satisfaction many times over and gave him such acute pleasure that at first it almost drove him mad. He rushed headlong into these intoxicating delights to which his own sanguine nature had previously never had access. So a strange process took place within him; he developed a nervous disposition which became dominant over the sanguine one and so modified his whole nature; he lost his ponderous calm and became much more alive. The point came when his nerves and his blood were in balance; this was his moment of deepest pleasure, when existence seemed perfect. Then the nerves began to dominate, and he fell victim to all the agonies and fears which torture those whose minds and bodies are disturbed.

Thus it was that shadows in a corner could make Laurent shake with fear like a cowardly child. This shivering, haggard creature, the new individual which had just emerged from the skin of the stolid, brutish peasant, was going through all the fears and anxieties experienced by those of a nervous disposition. Everything that had happened, from Thérèse's wild caresses, to the tension of the murder and his apprehensive expectation of physical pleasure afterwards, had conspired to drive him almost out of his mind, inflaming his senses by sudden and repeated attacks on his nerves. Insomnia had inevitably followed, together with hallucinations, and at that point Laurent fell into the intolerable existence of permanent horror with which he was now struggling.

His remorse was purely physical. Only his body, with its over-stretched nerves and trembling flesh, was afraid of the drowned man. His conscience had nothing to do with the terror he felt, and he did not in the least regret having killed Camille; in periods of calm when the ghost was not there, he would have committed the murder all over again if he had thought it was in his interests to do so. During the day he mocked his own fears and swore to himself that he would be strong,

constantly chiding Thérèse for unsettling him. For, as he put it to her, she was the one who was afraid, she was the sole cause of the terrible scenes that occurred each night in the bedroom. But as soon as night fell and he was shut in the room with his wife, beads of chill sweat appeared on his skin and he was riven with childish fears. Thus he went through periodic crises, attacks of nerves which deranged his senses and made his victim's green and revolting face appear to him every evening. It was like the onslaught of some fearful illness, a sort of murderer's hysteria, for illness and nervous affliction were truly the only terms in which to describe the terrors Laurent was going through. His face became twisted, his limbs went rigid, and all his sinews stood out in knots. His body was suffering terribly but his soul remained absent; the wretched fellow did not feel in the least repentant. Thérèse's passion had infected him with a terrible sickness, and that was all.

Thérèse, too, was experiencing profound disturbances, but in her case it was simply because her fundamental nature had become abnormally amplified. Since the age of ten she had been troubled by nervous disorders, due in part to the way she had been brought up in the fetid, nauseating air of little Camille's sick-room. Thus there had built up within her an accumulation of stormy impulses and powerful fluids, which would give rise in later life to truly tempestuous outbursts. Laurent had given her, as she had given him, a brutal shock. From their first amorous embrace, her inflexible but sensual temperament had developed with furious intensity and she had lived solely for her passion. As she had given herself over more and more completely to the desires burning within her, she had sunk into a sort of unhealthy stupor in which everything that happened seemed to overwhelm her and drive her nearer to madness. She responded to the frights she had received with more womanly weakness than her new husband; she had a vague sense of remorse, and some regrets which she would not acknowledge, and she sometimes felt tempted to throw herself down on her knees and implore Camille's ghost to forgive her, swearing to appease him by repenting. It may be that Laurent noticed these cowardly urges in Thérèse, for whenever they found themselves in the grip of

a common terror, he would take it out on her and treat her harshly.

For the first few nights they could not bring themselves to go to bed at all. They sat in front of the fire waiting for dawn, as they had done on their wedding night, for the thought of lying side by side in bed filled them with horror and repugnance. By an unspoken agreement they avoided any sort of embrace, and never even looked at the bed that Thérèse unmade every morning. When exhaustion overcame them they would fall asleep for an hour or two in their armchairs, only to be jolted awake by the sinister climax of some dreadful nightmare. When they woke, with stiff and aching limbs and blotchy faces, shivering with cold and feeling thoroughly unwell, they would look at each other in stupefaction, each amazed at seeing the other there. They always behaved with peculiar modesty towards each other, as if ashamed of revealing their revulsion and their terror.

They would fight against sleep for as long as they could, sitting at either side of the fireplace and talking about a thousand trivial things, taking care not to let the conversation flag. There was a wide gap between them, in front of the hearth, and whenever they turned their heads they imagined that Camille had pulled up a chair and was sitting there, toasting his toes with a lugubrious and mocking air. The apparition which they had seen on their wedding night was now coming back every night. This horribly disfigured corpse which was always there, silently observing and ridiculing their conversations, filled them with constant anxiety. They did not dare move, but blinded themselves by staring straight into the flames; and then, when they could no longer prevent themselves from looking nervously round, their eyes, dazzled by the burning coals, actually created the apparition and imparted to it a sinister red glow.

In the end Laurent refused to sit down at all, though he would not tell Thérèse the reason. She realized that he must be seeing Camille, just as she was, so she declared in her turn that she found the heat too much and would feel better a few feet away from the fire. She pushed her armchair over to the foot of the bed and huddled there instead, while her husband resumed his pacing up and down the room. From

time to time he would open the window, letting the cold January nights fill the room with their freezing air, in order to cool his fever.

For a week the newly married couple spent the whole of every night like this. They would doze off and take a little rest during the day, Thérèse behind the counter in the shop, Laurent at his office; but at night they were entirely prey to pain and fear. Yet the strangest thing of all was their attitude to each other. They spoke not one loving word, but pretended to have forgotten the past, seeming merely to live in mutual toleration, like sick people who feel a secret sympathy for each other's sufferings. Each hoped to conceal his or her fear and loathing from the other, and neither seemed to notice anything strange about the way they were spending their nights, which should have taught them a lot about each other's state of mind. When they stayed up until morning, hardly speaking, turning pale at the slightest sound, they looked as if they thought all couples behaved the same way in the first days of their married life. Theirs was the inept hypocrisy of two insane people.

Soon they were so utterly worn out that, one evening, they made up their minds to lie down on the bed, but without undressing. So, still in their clothes, they threw themselves down on the bedspread, fearful lest their skin should touch, for they felt as if the slightest contact would give them a painful shock. Then, after they had dozed fitfully like that for two nights, they ventured to take off their clothes and slip in between the sheets. But they still kept apart and took precautions to avoid accidently touching each other. Thérèse would get in first and take up her position along the far edge of the bed, against the wall. Laurent would wait until she had stretched out properly, then lie down himself along the near side, right by the edge. Between them there was a wide gap; that was where Camille's corpse lay.

When the two murderers were lying under the same sheet, with their eyes closed, they thought they could feel their victim's clammy body lying between them in the middle of the bed, and it made their flesh icy cold. It was like a repulsive obstacle between them. They were seized by a feverish delusion which made the obstacle seem real: they could touch the body, see it stretched out there like a greenish, half-putrefied lump

of meat, and smell the revolting stench given off by this mass of decomposing humanity. All their senses were in the grip of hallucinations which heightened everything they felt to the point where it became unbearable. The presence of this foul bedfellow made them lie there quite still, not speaking, petrified with terror. Occasionally Laurent thought of taking Thérèse violently into his arms, but he dared not move, thinking that he could not stretch out an arm without getting a handful of Camille's spongy flesh. Then it occurred to him that the drowned man was deliberately lying down between them in order to prevent their embracing, and he realized that Camille was jealous.

Occasionally, however, they did try to exchange a furtive embrace, to see what would happen. Laurent would teasingly order his wife to give him a kiss, but their lips were so cold that death seemed to have come and taken up position between their two mouths. They both felt sick. Thérèse shuddered in horror and Laurent, hearing her teeth chattering in fear, became angry with her.

'What are you shaking for?' he shouted at her. 'Surely you're not scared of Camille, are you? Where he is now, the poor devil can hardly object!'

They both avoided telling each other the real reason for their fear. Whenever one of them saw the drowned man's pallid mask in a hallucination, they would shut their eyes and lock his terror up inside them, not daring to speak to the other of what they had seen for fear of bringing on an even more appalling crisis. When Laurent, at the end of his tether, accused Thérèse in a despairing frenzy of being afraid of Camille, the name spoken aloud always made their terror worse than ever. By now the murderer was becoming quite hysterical.

'Yes, yes,' he stammered at her, 'you're scared of Camille, aren't you? It's as clear as day, for God's sake . . . Stupid bitch, you haven't an ounce of courage . . . Don't worry, you can sleep tight all right; or do you think your first husband is going to come and drag you out of bed by the feet, just because I'm in here with you?'

At the very idea that the drowned man might come and tug at their feet, Laurent's hair stood on end. He went on even more violently, torturing himself:

'I shall have to take you down to the cemetery one night ... We'll open up Camille's coffin so that you can see what kind of a putrefied mess there is inside! Then perhaps you won't be so scared of him! In any case, it's not as if he knows we shoved him in the water!'

Muffled groans were heard from Thérèse, who had buried her head in the bedclothes.

'Look, we chucked him in because he was getting to be a nuisance,' continued her husband, 'and we'd chuck him in again if we had to, wouldn't we? So stop being childish and get a grip on yourself. It's silly to upset our happiness like this ... Don't you see, my dear, when we're dead and buried, the fact that we shoved a poor idiot in the Seine won't make a blind bit of difference to what happens to us, but we will have enjoyed each other to the full, and that's the main thing ... So come on and give me a kiss.'

She did kiss him, frigid and panic-stricken, and he was shaking just as much as she was.

For more than a fortnight Laurent wondered how on earth he could kill Camille again. He had pushed him into the river, but somehow he wasn't dead enough, and he kept coming back at night and getting into Thérèse's bed. Just when the murderers thought they had finished the job and could enjoy their passionate pleasures in peace, their victim came back to life again and turned their bed to ice. Thérèse was not a widow, and Laurent found himself married to a woman who already had a drowned man for a husband.

XXIII

LITTLE by little, Laurent fell into a state of raving fury. He resolved to chase Camille away from his bed. First he had gone to bed with all his clothes on, then he had avoided touching Thérèse. In the end, driven by rage and despair, he made up his mind to clasp his wife to him and crush her to death if necessary, rather than leave her to his victim's ghost. It was a brutal and domineering gesture of defiance.

In fact, the hope that Thérèse's kisses would cure his insomnia was the only thing that had induced him to enter her bedroom. Once he was there as her master, his body, racked by even more atrocious agonies, lost all interest in attempting a cure. For three weeks he remained utterly cast down, quite forgetting that he had done everything he had done in order to possess Thérèse, and unable to touch her without increasing his suffering, now that she was indeed his.

The sheer scale of his anguish finally jolted him out of his depression. In the first moment of stupor, in the strange desperation of their wedding night, it was not surprising that he should have forgotten the reasons which had pushed him towards marriage. But the repeated assaults of his appalling dreams had filled him with a smouldering annoyance which finally overcame his cowardly tendencies and gave him back his memory. He remembered that he had married Thérèse in order to drive away his nightmares by holding her tight in his arms. So one night, all of a sudden, that is just what he did, dragging her roughly to him even at the risk of having to lean across the drowned man's corpse.

She too was at the end of her tether; she would have flung herself into the fire, had she thought that the flames would purify her flesh and deliver her from her pain. She returned Laurent's embrace, determined either to be consumed by the fire of his caresses or to find in them relief.

They hugged each other in a horrible embrace. Pain and terror took the place of desire. When their limbs touched, they

felt as if they had fallen on to a pile of glowing embers. They let out a scream and clung more tightly to each other, so as not to leave any room for the drowned man between their bodies. But they could still feel pieces of him squashed revoltingly between them, freezing their skin in some places while the rest of them was burning hot.

Their kisses were appallingly cruel. Thérèse felt with her lips for the bite-mark on Laurent's stiffened, swollen neck, and feverishly clamped her mouth to it, for that was the gaping wound in their relationship, and, once that was cured, the murderers could sleep easy. She realized this, and was trying to cauterize the scar with the fire of her kisses. But she burned her own lips, and Laurent pushed her violently away, letting out a low moan as he did so, for he felt as if someone had held a red-hot iron to his neck. Thérèse, half crazed, came back and tried again to kiss the wound; she felt a bitter thrill in putting her lips to the place where Camille's teeth had sunk into Laurent's neck. The thought flashed across her mind of biting her husband in the same place, tearing out a great chunk of flesh and making a new, deeper wound which would take away all sign of the first one; she would no longer be afraid if the only imprint she saw was that of her own teeth. But Laurent protected his neck against her kisses; the smarting feeling was too overwhelming, so every time she brought her lips near he pushed her away. They continued fighting each other in this way, groaning desperately and struggling in their horrible embrace.

They fully realized that all they were doing was making their suffering worse. However hard they hugged each other in terrible embraces, burning and bruising each other until they both cried out in pain, they were unable to calm their horror-struck nerves. Every hug simply increased their loathing, and, while they were exchanging such terrible kisses, they were haunted by terrifying hallucinations, imagining that the drowned man was tugging at their feet and shaking the bed violently beneath them.

At one point they released each other, out of overwhelming revulsion and complete nervous rejection. Then they decided they were not going to admit defeat and fell back into each other's arms, only to be forced to let go again, feeling as if

red-hot needles had been stabbing their limbs. They tried several times to overcome their repugnance in this way, and to find oblivion in the exhaustion of their nerves. But every time their nervous excitement and tension caused them such frustration that the strain might have killed them if they had remained in each other's arms. However, this battle against their own bodies had worked them up into such a fury that they were determined to persevere and win. Suddenly, they were shattered by a spasm more acute than the others, and the unparalleled violence of the shock made them think they were going to have a seizure.

Thrown to opposite sides of the bed, burned up and bruised by their passion, they both began to cry.

And, through their sobbing, they thought they could hear the triumphant laugh of the drowned man, as he slipped between the sheets once more with howls of derision. They had not succeeded in driving him out of their bed; they were beaten. Camille lay down quietly between them while Laurent shed impotent tears and Thérèse shuddered lest the corpse should try to take advantage of its victory and seize her in turn in its decomposing arms, as her legitimate master. They had tried the ultimate remedy, and, now that it had failed, they realized that they would never again dare exchange the least kiss. The furious paroxysm of the senses which they had tried to induce as a way of killing off their fears had merely plunged them even deeper into horror. Feeling the chill contact of this corpse which was now going to keep them apart for ever, they shed tears of blood and wondered anxiously what was to become of them.

XXIV

JUST as old Michaud had hoped when he had worked to set up the marriage of Thérèse and Laurent, once the wedding was over Thursday evenings regained all their former jollity. Camille's death had put them in great danger, for the guests had ventured into the grieving household only with great reluctance; each week they feared that they would be bid a definitive farewell. The thought that the door of the shop would doubtless soon be closed to them appalled Michaud and Grivet, for they clung to their habits with the instinctive stubbornness of animals. They kept telling themselves that one fine day the old mother and the young widow would go off to mourn their dear departed in Vernon, or somewhere else, leaving them out in the cold on Thursday evenings, with nothing to do; they had visions of themselves wandering pathetically about the arcade, dreaming of never-ending domino games. Meanwhile, as they waited for these bad days to arrive, they timidly enjoyed the last remnants of their happiness, dropping round to the shop with concerned and conciliatory expressions on their faces and telling themselves that this might be the last time. These fears remained with them for more than a year, and, faced with Madame Raquin's tears and Thérèse's silence, they never dared let themselves go and have a good laugh. They no longer felt at home, as they had in Camille's day; they seemed, as it were, to be stealing every evening spent sitting round the dining-room table. It was in these desperate circumstances that old Michaud's selfishness had induced him to try his master-stroke of marrying Thérèse off to Laurent.

On the Thursday following the wedding Grivet and Michaud made a triumphal entrance. They had won. The dining-room was theirs once more, and they no longer had to fear being asked not to come again. They arrived well pleased with life, made themselves thoroughly at home, and trotted out all their old jokes one after the other. It was easy to see from their smug and confident airs that they thought a

revolution had come about. Camille's memory was no longer there; the dead husband, that life-chilling ghost, had been chased away by the living husband, and now the past with all its joys had come alive again. With Laurent replacing Camille, there was no longer any reason for gloom, the guests could laugh away without hurting anyone's feelings; in fact, it was their positive duty to laugh and cheer up this splendid family who were kind enough to invite them into their home. So Grivet and Michaud, who had been coming round for almost eighteen months on the pretext of consoling Madame Raquin, could now put their little hypocrisy to one side and turn up quite openly, and once more nod off in their chairs opposite each other to the clicking of dominoes.

Every week another Thursday evening would come round, and every week these grotesque death's heads which Thérèse had always found so exasperating would gather once more around the table. She talked of throwing them out, for their mindless laughter and stupid comments were getting on her nerves. But Laurent convinced her that it would be a mistake to send them packing, for it was vital to keep the present as much like the past as possible, and vital above all to stay on the right side of the police, those imbeciles who were protecting them from all suspicion. Thérèse gave way, the guests were well received, and they saw a long line of blissful, cosy evenings stretching ahead of them.

It was around this time that husband and wife began to lead a kind of double life.

In the morning, when daylight came to chase away the terrors of the night, Laurent would hastily throw on his clothes. He was only really at ease once he was in the dining-room, where his self-centred calm returned as he sat at the table before a huge bowl of milky coffee prepared by Thérèse. Madame Raquin, now such an invalid that she could scarcely walk downstairs to the shop, watched him with motherly smiles while he ate. As he swallowed his toast and filled his stomach, he gradually became more self-assured. After the coffee, he would drink a small glass of cognac, which would make him feel quite all right again. Then he would say: 'See you this evening,' to Madame Raquin and Thérèse, without ever kissing them goodbye, and saunter off to work. Spring was on its

way; the trees along the embankment were putting on leaves, clothing themselves in fine, pale-green lace. Down below, the river murmured caressingly past, while up above the early-morning sunlight had a gentle warmth to it. Laurent felt himself reawakening in the cool air as he filled his lungs with the scent of new life carried by these April and May breezes; he tried to keep in the sun, stopping to look at the silvery reflections sparkling on the Seine or listen to the noises along the embankment, letting the keen morning smells diffuse into him and enjoy the bright, happy morning with each one of his senses. He certainly had hardly a thought of Camille, although he did sometimes find himself staring idly at the Morgue, across the river; then his mind turned to the drowned man as someone brave might think back to a silly scare he had once had. With full stomach and freshly washed face, he recovered all his stolid peace of mind. Having arrived at his office, he always spent the day yawning and waiting for it to be time to go home; he was just like any other employee, bored stiff and without a thought in his head. The one idea he had was to hand in his notice and rent a studio, for he was vaguely dreaming of a new life of idleness, and that was enough to keep him busy until the evening. Memories of the shop in the arcade never intruded upon his thoughts, though in the evening, having longed since the morning for it to be time to go home, he would always leave unwillingly and walk back along the embankment in a worried, preoccupied frame of mind. However slowly he walked, he would eventually have to go back into the shop. And there, terror lay in wait for him.

Thérèse's feelings were similar. As long as Laurent was not with her, she felt at ease. She had got rid of the cleaning lady, saying that she did not clear up properly and there was dirt everywhere in the shop and the flat; she felt an overwhelming urge to tidy the place up. But the truth was that she was feeling the need to rush around doing things, to tire out her stiffened limbs. She bustled about all morning, sweeping, dusting, cleaning the bedrooms, washing crockery, and doing all the menial jobs that would have disgusted her in the past. These household tasks kept her on her feet, active but silent, until midday, leaving her no time to think about anything but cob-

webs hanging from the ceiling or grease on the plates. Then she turned to cooking and started preparing lunch. At table, Madame Raquin complained that she was always jumping up to fetch the next course; she was upset and concerned about her niece's frantic activity, but when she chided her for it, Thérèse always answered that they had to save money. After the meal, she would get changed and finally make up her mind to go and join her aunt behind the counter. There, drowsiness would come over her and, exhausted by sleepless nights, she would doze off, giving in to the delicious lethargy that took hold of her whenever she sat down. These were only light dozes, full of vague charms, which calmed her nerves. The memory of Camille had receded and she was now tasting the profound peace which comes to sick people whose pain suddenly leaves them. Her whole body felt lithe again and her mind free, as she settled into a sort of warm, healing oblivion. Without these few moments of calm, her organism would have collapsed under the pressure of her nervous system, and it was from these dozes that she drew the strength to endure further suffering, and the horror which the following night would bring. Not that she really went to sleep, for she hardly even lowered her eyelids; she would simply be lost in peaceful dreams, and, whenever a customer came in, she would open her eyes and serve the few sous-worth of goods she required, before floating off back into her dream world. Three or four perfectly happy hours would go by in this way, with her answering her aunt in monosyllables and really enjoying drifting off into a semi-conscious state where thought was suspended and she was able to sink back into herself. Every once in a while she would glance out into the arcade, feeling particularly comfortable on grey days when it was dark in the shop and she could conceal her lassitude in the shadows. The dank and dreadful passage, with its stream of poor devils going past soaked by the rain, their umbrellas dripping on the flagstones, seemed to her like the entrance-way to some place of evil, a sort of filthy, sinister corridor where nobody would come looking for her and disturbing her peace. Occasionally, when she noticed the dingy gloom around her and smelled the acrid stench of damp, she imagined that she had been buried alive and was surrounded by earth, deep in a communal grave all

crawling with corpses. She found this a consoling and peaceful thought, and told herself that she was safe now, she was going to die and would feel no more pain. At other times, when Suzanne dropped in to see her and stayed sitting by the counter all afternoon doing her embroidery, she was forced to keep her eyes open. Thérèse had now taken a liking to Olivier's wife, with her flabby face and sluggish movements, for she found the sight of the poor, timorous creature strangely comforting; she had made friends with her and liked to have her by her side, smiling her wan smiles, only half alive, bringing a stale cemetery smell into the shop. Whenever Suzanne's glassily transparent blue eyes gazed into hers, she felt a chill sense of well-being in her bones. Thérèse would wait around in this way until four o'clock. Then she would go back to the kitchen in order to tire herself out preparing Laurent's dinner with frantic haste. Whenever her husband appeared in the doorway, her throat went tight and her whole being was again overtaken by panic.

Every day, husband and wife experienced almost the same sensations. In the daytime, while they were apart, they could enjoy hours of delicious rest; in the evenings, as soon as they were together again, a nagging sense of unease overcame them.

However, the evenings were quiet enough. Thérèse and Laurent, who both shuddered at the prospect of going back into the bedroom, always stayed up as long as they could. Madame Raquin, half lying in a big armchair close by, chatted placidly to them. She spoke of Vernon, always thinking about her son but avoiding his name out of a kind of delicacy of feeling; she would smile at her dear children as she planned out their future for them. The lamp cast its pale glow on her white face, and her words sounded extraordinarily quiet in the dead, silent atmosphere. All the while the two murderers were sitting, silent and still, at her side, apparently listening devoutly to what she was saying; in reality, however, they made no effort to follow the poor old woman's ramblings, but were just glad of this quiet flow of words which prevented them from hearing their own clamorous thoughts. They did not dare to look at each other, but kept their eyes on Madame Raquin to ensure that their faces always wore the appropriate expression. They never mentioned going to bed and would have

stayed there until morning, listening to the old haberdasher's soothing babble, bathed in the calming influence which surrounded her, had she not shown a desire for her own bed. Only then did they leave the dining-room and retire despairingly to their room, rather as if they had been about to fling themselves into an abyss.

Soon, they began to find Thursday evenings very much preferable to these more intimate occasions. When they were alone with Madame Raquin, they could not lose themselves in company; the tenuous thread of their aunt's voice and her affectionate gaiety could not drown out their inner cries of anguish. As they felt bedtime approaching, they shuddered whenever their glance happened to settle on the door to the bedroom, and the wait for the moment when they would be alone became more and more cruel as the evening wore on. On Thursdays, however, they could become drugged by idiotic conversation and forget each other's presence completely, so that they suffered less. In the end even Thérèse began to look forward passionately to the days when guests were due, and if Michaud and Grivet had not arrived she would have gone to fetch them herself. With people from outside in the room between herself and Laurent, she felt less agitated, and she would have liked to have guests and noise all the time, something to distract and insulate her. In company, she put on a kind of nervous gaiety. Laurent too brought out again all the coarse jokes of his peasant origins, his belly-laughs and art student's pranks. Never had the evening gatherings been such jolly and noisy affairs.

So it was that, once a week, Thérèse and Laurent were able to face each other without shuddering.

It was not long before a new fear presented itself. Madame Raquin was gradually becoming paralysed, and they could foresee the day when she would be fixed immovably in her chair, physically helpless and unaware of her surroundings. The poor old woman was beginning to mutter in disconnected phrases, her voice was failing, and her limbs were becoming useless, one after the other. She was turning into a vegetable. With horror, Thérèse and Laurent watched this creature who could still keep them apart from each other, and whose voice shook them out of their bad dreams, slipping away from them.

Once the old haberdasher had lost her mind for good and just sat there stiff and silent in her chair, they would be on their own, with no way of escaping the face-to-face confrontation they feared every evening. When that happened, their dreadful ordeal would begin at six o'clock, rather than midnight; it would drive them mad.

So they tried by every means to preserve Madame Raquin's health, which meant so much to them. They called doctors in to see her and looked after her every need, finding that the job of sick-nurse brought a forgetfulness and a peace of mind which encouraged them to renew their efforts. They were anxious not to lose the third person who made their evenings together bearable; they did not want the dining-room, and the whole house, to become as awful and unpleasant as their bedroom. Madame Raquin was extremely touched at their zeal in caring for her, and kept tearfully congratulating herself on having united them and handed over to them her forty thousand or so of capital. Never, after her son's death, had she expected to receive so much affection in her last days, and the tenderness of her dear children warmed her old age; she did not feel the relentless advance of the paralysis which, despite all their efforts, was making her less mobile by the day.

Meanwhile, Thérèse and Laurent continued to lead their double lives. It was as if there were two quite distinct people in each of them: one, nervy and terrified, who started shaking as soon as darkness fell, the other sluggish and unconcerned, who breathed easily as soon as the sun was up. They were living two different existences, screaming in terror when they were left on their own, smiling serenely when there were other people there. In public, their faces never ever hinted at the agonies which tortured them in private; they appeared peaceful and happy, and instinctively concealed their sufferings.

Nobody who saw them behaving so peacefully during the day could have guessed what hallucinations tormented them every night. They seemed like a couple blessed by heaven, living a perfectly happy existence together. Grivet's gallant name for them was 'the turtle-doves'. When long nights without sleep left them with bags under their eyes, he joked about it and asked when the christening was to be, which always

provoked general mirth. Laurent and Thérèse hardly paled, and managed to raise a smile; they were becoming used to the old employee's innuendoes. So long as they were still in the dining-room, they were able to master their terrors. But it was impossible to guess the awful transformation which came over them as soon as they shut themselves up in the bedroom. On Thursday evenings in particular, the change was so violent and brutal that it seemed to be happening in a supernatural world. The strangeness and wild excesses of their nightly dramas defied belief, and were kept hidden deep down in their tortured minds. If ever they had spoken about them to anyone else, they would have been taken for mad.

'What a happy pair of lovers they are!' old Michaud was fond of remarking. 'They don't say much, but they don't think about it any the less. I bet they devour each other with kisses when we aren't there!'

That was certainly the view of the whole company. Soon Thérèse and Laurent were being held up as an ideal couple. Their affection, quiet happiness, and apparently endless honeymoon were celebrated right through the Passage du Pont-Neuf. They alone knew that the corpse of Camille lay between them in bed, and only they could feel beneath the calm surface of their faces the nervous contractions which, at night, horribly distorted their features and changed their placid expressions into hideous, aching masks.

XXV

AFTER four months Laurent started to think about reaping some of the benefits he had expected from marriage. He would have abandoned his wife and fled from the ghost of Camille three days after the wedding, had self-interest not kept him tied to the shop in the Passage du Pont-Neuf. He accepted the nights of terror, and stayed in that suffocating atmosphere of fear, so as not to forgo the rewards of his crime. If he left Thérèse, he would slide back into poverty and be forced to keep on working; as long as he remained with her, on the other hand, he could indulge his taste for lazing around and living the good life, with no need to work, on the income that Madame Raquin had settled on his wife. He might well have run off with the forty thousand francs if only he had been able to cash them in, but on Michaud's advice the old haberdasher had taken the precaution of safeguarding her niece's interests in the contract. Thus Laurent found himself tightly bound to Thérèse. In compensation for the appalling nights he was enduring, he meant at least to be supported in pleasant idleness, with plenty to eat, warm clothes to wear, and enough money in his pocket to indulge his whims. Only at that price was he prepared to sleep next to the drowned man's corpse.

One evening he announced to his wife and Madame Raquin that he had handed in his resignation and would be leaving the office at the end of the fortnight. As Thérèse looked worried, he hastened to add that he was going to rent a small studio, where he would go back to his painting. He went on at length about the inconvenience of his job and the broad horizons that art would open up for him; now that he had a bit of money behind him he could make a bid for success, and he wanted to see whether he was capable of doing something really great. The tirade which he came out with on this subject merely concealed a burning desire to go back to the studio life he had been leading before. Thérèse remained tight-

lipped, for she had no intention of letting Laurent fritter away the small fortune on which her freedom depended. When her husband pressed her with questions in an attempt to gain her assent, she replied drily, pointing out that, if he left his office, he would no longer be bringing in any money, so he would have to depend entirely on her. While she was speaking, Laurent looked at her sharply in a disconcerting way that made the rejection she was about to pronounce stick in her throat; she thought she could read in her accomplice's eyes the menacing threat: 'If you don't agree, I'll spill the beans.' She began to stammer. Then Madame Raquin exclaimed that her dear son's wish was only fair and that they must provide him with the means of becoming a man of talent. The good lady was spoiling Laurent as she had spoiled Camille; the attentions he lavished on her had thoroughly softened her up, and she was now in his pocket and always ready to agree with whatever he said.

And so it was decided that the artist would rent a studio and receive a hundred francs a month to cover his various expenses. The family budget was arranged in the following way: the profits from the haberdashery would pay the rent on the flat and the shop, and would almost cover the household's regular outgoings; Laurent would take the rent for the studio and his hundred francs a month out of the investment income of just over two thousand francs, and the rest would go on things they all needed. Thus the capital would remain untouched, which somewhat reassured Thérèse. She made her husband swear never to go over his allowance. In any case, she reflected, Laurent could never get his hands on the forty thousand without her signature; she resolved never to sign any papers.

The very next day Laurent rented a little studio near the bottom of the Rue Mazarine which he had had his eye on for a month. He did not intend to leave his job without first finding a retreat where he could spend his days in peace, away from Thérèse. At the end of the fortnight he bade farewell to his colleagues. Grivet was stunned at his departure. A young man with such a fine future ahead of him, he observed, a young man who in only four years had reached a salary that had taken him, Grivet, twenty years to attain! He was even more astounded when Laurent told him that he was going

to devote himself entirely to painting again.

Finally the artist moved into his studio. It was a sort of attic some five or six metres square with a steeply sloping ceiling into which was let a large window, which shed a harsh, white light on the floor and the grubby walls. The noises of the street did not rise to that height. The silent, pale-looking room, with its opening high up, out on to the sky, was like a hole in the ground, a burial vault dug out of grey clay. Laurent furnished it after a fashion, bringing up two chairs in need of recaning, a table which he propped against the wall to stop it collapsing on to the floor, an old kitchen dresser, his paint box, and his old easel; the only touch of luxury was provided by a huge divan he had picked up from a second-hand furniture dealer for thirty francs.

He went two weeks without even dreaming of taking up his brushes. He would arrive between eight and nine o'clock, lie down on the divan and smoke, and wait for midday, pleased that it was still morning and there were still long hours of daylight ahead of him. At noon he would go home for lunch, then hurry back so as to be on his own and not to have to look at Thérèse's pale face any longer. Then he would wait for his food to go down, dozing and lounging about until evening. His studio was a haven of peace where he felt no fear. One day his wife asked if she could visit his precious retreat. He refused, but she came knocking on the door anyway; he did not open it, and told her that evening that he had spent the day at the Louvre. He was afraid that Thérèse might bring the ghost of Camille in with her.

In the end he grew bored with doing nothing, so he bought a canvas and some paints and set to work. Not having enough money to pay models, he resolved to paint whatever his imagination suggested, without bothering whether it was true to life. He began with a male head.

Nor did he stay cooped up indoors as much as he had done in the past; he would work for two or three hours each morning, then spend the afternoon strolling around Paris or one of the suburbs. He was on his way back from one of these long walks when, just outside the Institute, he bumped into an old school friend who had just had a triumph, thanks to the support of his friends, at the last Salon.

'What, you?' exclaimed the painter. 'Laurent, you poor

fellow, I'd never have recognized you! You've got thinner.'

'I'm married now,' said Laurent with embarrassment.

'You, married? I'm not surprised to see you looking so odd, then. So what are you up to these days ?'

'I'm renting a little studio, and doing a bit of painting in the mornings.'

Laurent said a little about his marriage, then launched into an excited account of his future plans. The friend looked at him with an astonished expression which both flustered and worried him. The truth was that the painter was finding it difficult to reconcile this husband of Thérèse's with the rough, common fellow he had known in the old days. Laurent now seemed to be cutting a much more distinguished figure; his face had slimmed down and had become fashionably pale, while his whole bearing was more dignified and graceful.

'But you're turning into quite a dandy,' the artist could not help exclaiming; 'you look just like an ambassador, and all got up in the latest style, too. So whose school are you working for?'

Laurent found the scrutiny to which he was being subjected unpleasant, but did not dare break off the conversation abruptly.

'Would you like to come up to my studio for a minute?' he finally asked the friend, who was making no move to go.

'I'd be delighted to,' he replied.

Unable fully to understand the changes he was seeing, the painter was keen to visit his old friend's studio. He was not going to climb up five storeys just to see Laurent's new works, which would almost certainly make him feel queasy; all he wanted to do was satisfy his curiosity.

Once upstairs, he glanced at the canvases hanging on the walls and was even more astonished. He saw five studies, two female and three male heads, painted with real energy; they were all solidly and confidently constructed, each standing out in magnificent patches of colour against a light grey background. The artist rushed forward, astounded and not even trying to conceal his surprise:

'Did you do these?' he asked.

'Yes', Laurent replied. 'They're sketches for a big picture I'm working on.'

'Come on, stop pulling my leg; are you really the one who put those together?'

'Of course; why shouldn't I be?'

The painter did not dare to reply: 'Because they are the work of a real artist, and you have never been more than a hopeless botcher.' He stood for a long time in silence before the studies. They were clumsy, of course, but they had a strange quality to them, and such power that they bore witness to a highly developed artistic sensibility. It was as if they had been painted from experience. Never before had Laurent's friend seen sketches so full of the highest promise. When he had studied them properly, he turned towards their creator:

'Well, honestly, I would never have thought you were up to painting stuff like that; where on earth did you learn to be so talented ? It's not normally something they can teach you.'

And he looked closely at Laurent, whose voice seemed gentler and whose every movement had a kind of elegance about it. He could never guess what terrible shock had changed this man, giving him the nervous sensitivity and the acute and delicate sensations of a woman. Some strange transformation had undoubtedly come about in the organism of Camille's murderer. It is difficult for analysis to penetrate to such depths. Perhaps Laurent had become an artist in the same way that he had become a coward, as a result of the drastic upheaval that had thrown his body and his mind off balance. In the past, he was weighed down and stifled by his sanguine temperament, and his vision was blocked by the dense vapours of good health which surrounded him; now that he was thinner, and more sensitive, he had the restless vitality and keen, direct sensations of those of nervous temperament. In the life of terror he was leading, his mind was released from reason and could soar to the dizzy ecstasies of genius; the quasi-moral sickness, the neurosis which afflicted his whole being, had developed in him a peculiarly lucid artistic sensibility; since he had killed a man, his body felt lighter, his frantically working brain seemed immense, and, in this abrupt enlargement of his intellect, exquisite creations, poetic reveries, passed before his mind's eye. And so it was that his movements had suddenly become elegant, and his paintings works of beauty, for they

were now much more personal and full of life.

His friend did not try to probe any deeper into the birth of the artist. He left, with his astonishment intact. Before going, he looked at the canvases once more and said to Laurent:

'I've only one criticism to make, which is that all your studies have a certain family likeness; they look too similar. Even the women have something violent about them which makes them look like men in disguise ... So you see, if you want to turn these sketches into a picture, you'll have to alter some of the faces; they can't all be brothers and sisters, it would make people laugh.'

He went out of the studio, then on the landing outside he said with a smile:

'Seriously, though, it's been really good to see you again, old chap. From now on, I'll believe in miracles ... You're certainly making quite a go of it!'

He set off downstairs, and Laurent went back into the studio in a deeply troubled frame of mind. When his friend had remarked on the family likeness between his pictures he had turned abruptly away to hide the fact that his face had gone white, for he himself had already been struck by the unavoidable resemblance between them. He walked slowly over and stood in front of the canvases; as he contemplated them and looked across from one to another, a chill sweat ran down his back.

'He's right,' he muttered, 'they do all look alike ... They all look like Camille.'

He backed away and sat down on the divan, unable to tear his eyes away from the painted heads. The first had the face of an old man with a long white beard, beneath which the artist could make out Camille's weak chin. The second represented a fair-haired girl, and she looked back at him with his victim's blue eyes. Each of the other three had one or other of the drowned man's features. It was as if Camille had been dressed up as an old man or a young girl, taking on whatever guise it pleased the artist to give him but always keeping the same underlying appearance. There was another dreadful point of resemblance between these heads: they all seemed to be terrified and in pain, they all seemed overwhelmed by the same feeling of horror. Each had a slight wrinkle to the

left of the mouth which gave them a grimacing air. This wrinkle, which Laurent remembered seeing on the drowned man's face, was the sign of their repulsive family relationship.

Laurent realized that he had spent too much time at the Morgue gazing at Camille, and that the image of the corpse had become deeply etched in his mind. Now, without him being in any way aware of it, his hand kept tracing out the features of that dreadful face whose memory followed him wherever he went.

Gradually, as he lay back on the divan, the painter began to see the figures coming to life. Then there were five Camilles in front of him, five Camilles created by the power of his own hands, who by a strange and horrifying process had taken on the appearance of different ages and both sexes. He jumped up, slashed the canvases to bits, and flung them out of the door, telling himself that he would die of fear in his studio if he went on filling it like that with portraits of his victim.

He had just been struck by a new dread: he was afraid that he would never again be able to draw a head without it taking on the drowned man's appearance. He resolved to find out immediately whether or not he was in control of his own hand. He set a blank canvas on the easel, then, in a few quick strokes with a piece of charcoal, he roughed out a face. It looked like Camille. Quickly he erased that sketch and tried another. For a whole hour he fought against the compulsion that was directing his fingers. With each new attempt he came back to the drowned man's face. However strongly he exerted his will to avoid the lines he knew so well, they were the ones he kept drawing, as, despite himself, he obeyed the promptings of his rebellious nerves and muscles. He had started by sketching as fast as possible, then he worked at controlling the charcoal much more slowly. The results were the same: Camille, with his agonizing, contorted look, kept appearing on the canvas. Laurent sketched a great variety of heads one after the other, from angels, to virgins with haloes, to helmeted Roman warriors, pink-skinned, fair-haired children, and old scar-faced ruffians; always, always it was Camille who reappeared, as angel, virgin, warrior, child, or ruffian. So Laurent launched into caricature, exaggerating features, inventing monstrous profiles and grotesque heads, but he only succeeded in making

the striking portraits of his victim even more horrible to look at. He finished up by drawing animal heads, dogs and cats, and these, too, looked vaguely like Camille.

By now Laurent was boiling with sullen rage. He punched a hole through the canvas with his fist, thinking despairingly of his great picture. There was no question now of completing it, for he realized that from now on all he would ever be able to paint was Camille's portrait, and, as his friend had told him, a collection of faces that all looked the same would make people laugh. He visualized his great work as it would have been, and, on the shoulders of all his characters, men and women alike, he saw the pasty, terrified face of the drowned man; this strange vision struck him as appallingly ridiculous and filled him with exasperation.

So he would not dare to paint ever again, for fear of bringing his victim back to life at the least stroke of his brush; if he wanted to live in peace in his own studio, he must never paint there. The thought that his fingers had an unavoidable and involuntary ability to keep on reproducing Camille's portrait made him stare at his hand in terror. It felt as if it no longer belonged to him.

XXVI

THE attack that had been hovering over Madame Raquin finally came. Suddenly, the paralysis which for several months had been creeping along her limbs and threatening at any moment to take her body into its embrace, seized her by the throat and bound her hand and foot. One evening, as she was chatting peacefully to Thérèse and Laurent, she stopped in mid-sentence, her mouth gaping open, feeling as if she were being strangled. When she tried to scream and call for help, she could only come out with rasping noises. Her tongue had turned to stone, her hands and feet had gone stiff. She had been struck dumb and immobilized.

Thérèse and Laurent got to their feet, horrified at this thunderbolt which had struck the old lady down in a matter of seconds. Seeing her unable to move and gazing imploringly up at them, they plied her with questions to try and find out what had caused the problem. She could not reply but kept looking at them in horrible anguish. So they realized that what they had in front of them was now no more than a body half alive, which could see and hear them, but not speak. This attack plunged them into despair, not because they were concerned at the paralysed woman's sufferings, but out of self-pity, because they would have to live from now on with only each other for company.

From that day forth, the couple's life became unbearable. They spent evenings of torment sitting in front of the aged invalid, who could no longer calm their fears for them with her rambling conversation. She sat slumped in a chair like some inanimate bundle, and they were left on their own, at either end of the table, embarrassed and fearful. This semi-corpse could no longer keep them apart; at times they forgot that it was there, or took it for part of the furniture. Then their nocturnal terrors would come over them again and the dining-room became, like the bedroom, a terrible place where the ghost of Camille kept rising up before them. As a result, their suffering now went on for an extra four or five hours

a day. As soon as it was dusk, they would start to tremble and lower the lampshade to avoid having to look at each other, trying to believe that Madame Raquin would soon say something and so remind them of her presence. The only reason they kept her there rather than getting rid of her was because her eyes were still alive, and they occasionally felt slightly comforted to watch them shining and moving around.

They always sat the old invalid right in the glare of the lamp, to keep her face well lit and so that they would always have her in front of them. This wan and formless face would have been an unbearable sight to other people, but they felt such a desperate need of company that their gaze rested on it with real joy. It looked like a decayed death mask with two living eyes in the middle; they alone could move, rolling rapidly from side to side in their sockets; the cheeks and the mouth seemed petrified in their terrifying immobility. Whenever Madame Raquin gave in to sleep and let her eyelids close, her still, chalky-white face really became that of a corpse; Thérèse and Laurent, feeling that there was nobody with them any more, would then make a noise until the paralytic opened her eyes again and looked at them. In this way they forced her to stay awake.

They regarded her as a distraction from their nightmares. Since she had become an invalid, she needed to be looked after like a child, and the things they had to do to care for her shook them out of their own preoccupations. In the morning, Laurent would lift her out of bed and put her in her chair, then take her back to bed again in the evening; she was still quite a weight, and it took all his strength to pick her up gently in his arms and move her. It was also he who shifted her chair around. All the other duties fell to Thérèse: she would dress the old lady, feed her, and try to understand what she wanted. For some days Madame Raquin retained the use of her hands, so she could write down what she wanted on a slate; then they too went dead and she could no longer raise them or hold a pencil, which left her with only the language of the eyes with which to make her niece guess what she wanted. Thus Thérèse devoted herself to the arduous task of being a sick-nurse, which kept her mind and body occupied and so did her a great deal of good.

To avoid being alone together, the couple would move the poor old lady's chair into the dining-room first thing in the morning. They brought her in to join them as if she were somehow necessary to their existence, and they made her sit at all their meals and listen to all their conversations. Whenever she indicated that she wanted to go back to her own room, they pretended not to understand. All that she was good for was to stop them being alone; she had no right to live her own life. At eight o'clock Laurent would go off to his studio, and Thérèse downstairs to the shop, leaving the paralysed old woman on her own in the dining-room until noon; then, after lunch, she would be alone again until six. During the day, her niece would often go upstairs and fuss around to make sure she had everything she wanted. The friends of the family could hardly find words to extol the virtues of Thérèse and Laurent.

The Thursday evening gatherings continued, with the invalid present as before. They pulled her chair up to the table, and from eight o'clock to eleven she stayed wide awake, looking round from one guest to another with a penetrating gleam in her eye. The first few times, old Michaud and Grivet were somewhat embarrassed by the sight of their old friend's lifeless body; they did not know what expression to put on, their grief was not all that great, and they wondered how much of a display of sadness the situation required. Should they speak to this inanimate face, or take no notice of it at all? Gradually they came round to the idea of treating Madame Raquin as if nothing had happened, and in the end they would pretend to be quite unaware of her condition. They chatted to her, supplying the answers to their own questions, laughing on her account as well as their own, and never letting themselves be put out by the rigid expression on her face. It was an odd sight, for these men seemed to be talking rationally to a statue, behaving much as little girls do with their dolls. The paralytic woman sat there stiff and silent in front of them while they babbled away, waving their arms around excitedly and holding lively conversations with her. Michaud and Grivet kept congratulating themselves on their impeccable behaviour. They thought that, by acting in this way, they were showing their politeness; it also spared them the inconvenience of having

to express sympathy in the customary way. They expected Madame Raquin to be flattered at being treated like a healthy person, and this, they thought, dispensed them from the slightest scruples about making merry in her presence.

Grivet developed a personal obsession. He claimed to be perfectly attuned to what Madame Raquin was thinking, and maintained that, as soon as she looked at him, he knew at once what she wanted. This was just another of his delicate attentions; the only problem was that he always got it wrong. He would often interrupt the game of dominoes, look hard at the paralysed woman whose eyes were quietly following the play, and declare that she was asking for such and such. But when they checked, Madame Raquin either wanted nothing at all, or something completely different. This never discouraged Grivet, who would triumphantly exclaim 'Now what did I tell you?' before starting again a few minutes later. It was quite a different matter when the invalid did actually want something; then, Thérèse, Laurent, and the guests would call out one thing after another, to see what it might be. In the course of this, Grivet always drew attention to himself by the inanity of his suggestions. He always said whatever came into his head, at random, and was forever offering her the opposite of what she wanted. Which did not prevent him from repeating:

'I can read her eyes like a book, I can. Look there, she's telling me I'm right. Aren't you, dear lady. . . . Yes, yes.'

In any case, it was far from easy to work out what the poor old woman wanted. Thérése alone possessed the knack. She could communicate fairly easily with that walled-in intelligence, still alive but buried deep within a dead body. What was going on inside this poor creature who was just sufficiently alive to observe life going on around her but not to participate in it? She could see and hear, she could doubtless also think clearly, but she had neither the gestures nor the voice to externalize the thoughts that were welling up within her. Maybe her thoughts were choking her? She could not have lifted a hand or opened her mouth, even if one movement, one word, from her had been enough to decide the fate of the world. Her mind was akin to one of those people who are accidentally buried alive and who wake up in the darkness of the earth, two or three metres below ground; they struggle and shout,

and others walk around on top of them without hearing their dreadful lamentations. Often, as he looked at Madame Raquin, with her lips shut tight and her hands stretched out on her knees, putting the whole of her life into her quick, darting eyes, Laurent would say to himself:

'Who knows what she's thinking about, on her own . . . There must be some cruel drama going on deep down in that useless body of hers.'

Laurent was mistaken. Madame Raquin was happy, quite happy in the care and affection of her dear children. She had always dreamed of ending her days like that, slowly, surrounded by devoted and loving attention. Naturally, she would have preferred still to be able to speak, so as to thank her friends for helping her die in peace. But she accepted her condition without resentment; the peaceful and retiring life that she had always led, and the gentleness of her temperament, prevented her from suffering too much from her enforced silence and immobility. She had regressed into childhood, living her days without worry, staring straight ahead and lost in thoughts of the past. In the end she even began to enjoy sitting still in her chair, like a good little girl.

Day by day her eyes became gentler, brighter, and more penetrating. She had learned to use them like a hand or a mouth, to make requests and thank people with, and in this strange but delightful way she was able to compensate for the organs she could no longer use. Her eyes shone forth with a celestial beauty amid the drooping, grimacing flesh of her face. Since her twisted, unmoving lips could no longer smile, she smiled adorable and affectionate smiles with her eyes instead, moist gleams and bright rays shining forth from them like those of the morning sun. It was really most strange to see those eyes laughing just like lips in such a dead face, the lower part of which remained sallow and mournful while the upper part was lit with a divine radiance. It was for her dear children in particular that she poured all her soul's gratitude and affection into a simple glance in this way. When Laurent picked her up in his arms, morning and evening, to move her around, she would thank him lovingly in looks of effusive tenderness.

She lived like this for several weeks, waiting for death and

believing herself safe from further misfortune, for she thought that she had now had her fair share of suffering. But she was wrong. One evening, she was shattered by an appalling blow.

It was useless for Thérèse and Laurent to sit her between them, full in the light, for she was no longer sufficiently alive to separate them and give them protection from their fears. Whenever they forgot that she was there and could still see and hear them, they were gripped by panic, saw the ghost of Camille, and tried to drive it away. At such moments of tension their speech became confused, and one day they let slip an admission which unwittingly revealed the truth to Madame Raquin. Laurent had a kind of fit during which he talked like a man hallucinating. Suddenly the paralysed old woman knew the truth.

A horrifying contortion passed across her face and she shuddered so much that Thérèse thought she was about to jump up and scream; then she fell back, ramrod stiff in her chair. This type of shock was all the more horrendous because it seemed that it had suddenly galvanized a corpse. Her physical sensitivity, having returned for a second, vanished again and left the invalid looking even more sickly and downcast than before. But her eyes, normally so gentle, had become hard and black, like steel.

Never had despair fallen so brutally upon a human being. The appalling truth, like a flash of lightning, scorched the paralytic's eyes and burned its way into her with the supreme violence of a thunderbolt. If she had been able to stand up and bring out the scream of horror which was rising in her throat, to curse her son's murderers, she would have suffered less horribly. But, having heard and understood everything, she was forced to remain silent and immobile, keeping the full force of her anguish bottled up inside her. She felt as if Thérèse and Laurent had tied her up and bound her to her chair to prevent her from leaping to her feet, and that they were deriving some unspeakable pleasure from telling her over and over again: 'We killed Camille,' after fixing a gag over her mouth to stifle her sobbing. Sensations of horror and panic coursed up and down in her body, unable to find a way out. She made superhuman efforts to lift the crushing weight from her chest, and to clear a passage in her throat through which to let her

despair flood out. But it was in vain that she summoned up her last strength, for she could feel the tongue pressed cold against the roof of her mouth, and was quite incapable of making her deadened body obey; she was held rigid by a corpse-like impotence. Her feelings were like those of someone who has fallen into a death-trance and is being buried, with shovelfuls of earth thumping down on his head while he just lies there, bound and gagged by his own body.

The ravages brought about in her heart were even more terrible. She felt the collapse of everything, and was utterly crushed. Her whole existence was devastated, for all her affection, her kind feelings, her devoted care, had been brutally knocked down and trampled underfoot. Her life had been an affectionate and gentle one, and then, at the very last, when she was on the point of carrying her belief in the calm joy of existence with her into the grave, a voice had suddenly screamed out that it was all lies, nothing but iniquity. The tearing of this veil showed her, underlying the love and friendship which she had thought she could see, a terrifying spectacle of blood and shame. She would have cursed God if she had been able to utter the blasphemy. God had been deceiving her for more than sixty years, treating her like a nice, sweet little girl and placing false pictures of peace and joy before her eyes to amuse her. And she had remained a child, naïvely believing a thousand idiotic things and not seeing that real life was bogged down in the blood and mire of the passions. God was wicked; he should have told her the truth earlier, or else let her depart this world still blind and innocent. Now, the only thing left for her was to die denying love, denying friendship, denying devotion to others. Nothing existed except murder and lust.

So Camille had died at the hands of Thérèse and Laurent, who had thought up their crime while wallowing in the shame of adultery! This thought was such an abyss for Madame Raquin that she could not comprehend it with her reason, nor yet grasp its meaning in any clear and detailed way. Her only sensation was that of a horrible fall; she felt as if she were plunging into a cold, black hole. And she kept telling herself: 'I'm going to be smashed to bits when I hit the bottom.'

After the first shock, she found the sheer monstrosity of

the crime unbelievable. Then, once the certainty of adultery and murder had taken root in her mind, she began to remember little incidents from the past which she had not understood at the time, and she feared she was going mad. Yes, Thérèse and Laurent were indeed the murderers of Camille, Thérèse whom she had brought up, Laurent whom she had loved with a mother's devotion and affection. All that went round and round in her head like a huge wheel, with a deafening din. She guessed at such revolting details, went down to such depths of deception, and relived in her mind such a horribly two-faced display of duplicitous behaviour, that she would rather have died than have to think about it any more. One single idea went on grinding mechanically and implacably round in her head with all the heavy relentlessness of a millstone, as she repeated to herself: 'My children are the ones who killed my child.' She could find no other way to express her despair.

In the abrupt reversal of all her feelings, she tried in a panic to recognize her former self, but without success; she was overwhelmed by a brutal influx of vengeful thoughts which drove all goodness from her life. After this transformation, an inner darkness descended on her; she felt a new being, cruel and pitiless, coming to life in her dying body, a being who wanted to tear her son's murderers to pieces.

Once she had succumbed to the shattering embrace of paralysis, and realized that she would never be able to leap at the throats of Thérèse and Laurent and carry out her dream of strangling them, she resigned herself to silence and immobility, and great tears rolled slowly from her eyes. Nothing could be more heart-rending than this still, wordless grief of hers. The tears running, one by one, down the lifeless face in which not a wrinkle moved, this inert, waxen face unable to show grief by its expression, and in which only the eyes cried, was a most moving sight.

Thérèse was overcome by horror and pity.

'We must put her to bed,' she said to Laurent.

Laurent hastily pushed the paralytic through into her bedroom, then bent down to pick her up in his arms. At this moment Madame Raquin hoped that some powerful mechanism would set her back on her feet, and made a supreme effort to stand. God could not possibly allow Laurent to clutch

her to his chest, and a thunderbolt would strike him dead if he had the monstrous impudence to try. But no such mechanism came into play, and the heavens withheld their thunder; she remained passively slumped in her chair, like a parcel of laundry. Then she was seized, picked up, and moved, and had to go through the ordeal of feeling herself limp and helpless in the arms of Camille's murderer. Her head lolled on to Laurent's shoulder and she stared at him through eyes widened by fear.

'That's right, go on, take a good look at me,' he muttered; 'your looks won't eat me . . .'

And he flung her roughly down on the bed, where she passed out. Her last thought had been one of terror and revulsion. From now on she would have to submit, day and night, to Laurent's foul embrace.

XXVII

ONLY a terrible fit of panic could ever have induced the couple to break their silence and admit what they had done in front of Madame Raquin. Neither of them was cruel at heart, and they would both have avoided making any such revelation out of humanity, even if their own safety had not already made it imperative for them to keep quiet.

The following Thursday they became particularly worried. In the morning Thérèse asked Laurent whether he thought it was wise to let the paralysed old woman stay in the dining-room during the evening gathering. Now that she knew everything, she might alert the others.

'Oh come on!' said Laurent; 'she can't even move her little finger; she's hardly going to start blabbing to them.'

'She might find a way,' replied Thérèse. 'Since the other evening, I've been reading in her eyes that she's determined to do something.'

'No, no, you see, the doctor told me that it really is all over for her. If she does ever open her mouth again, it'll be her last gasp . . . It's all right, she's not got long to go. It would be silly to put still more on our consciences, and prevent her from being there this evening . . . '

Thérèse shuddered.

'That's not what I meant,' she exclaimed. 'You're quite right, there's been enough blood as it is . . . I just thought we could lock her in her room and pretend she was feeling unwell and having a lie down.'

'Brilliant,' Laurent retorted; 'and then that idiot Michaud would walk straight in anyway, just to see his old friend . . . That would be an excellent way of giving the game away.'

He hesitated, trying to appear unruffled, but anxiety made him stammer:

'We'd do better to let events take their course. That lot are as thick as planks; they'll certainly not pick up on the old girl's desperate silence. They'll never suspect a thing;

they're too far from the truth. Once we've carried out this test, we'll know that we won't have to worry any more about being imprudent . . . You'll see, it'll be all right.'

That evening, when the guests arrived, Madame Raquin was in her usual place between the stove and the table. Laurent and Thérèse put on a show of good humour to hide their fear, and anxiously awaited the incident which could not fail to materialize. They had pulled the shade on the lamp right down so that only the oilcloth covering the table was in the light.

The guests began by engaging in the usual banal but noisy chit-chat preceding the first game of dominoes. Grivet and Michaud were careful to ask the paralytic the customary questions about her health, questions to which, as usual, they themselves provided most positive answers. After which the company took no more notice of the poor old woman, but plunged joyfully into the game.

Ever since she had found out the horrible secret, Madame Raquin had been fervently looking forward to this evening. She had pulled together the remnants of her strength in order to denounce the culprits. Right up to the last minute she had been afraid they would not allow her to be there; she thought that Laurent would get her out of the way, perhaps by killing her, or at least by locking her in her room. When she saw that they were going to let her stay after all, and later when she was there among the guests, she felt a hot flush of joy at the thought that she was going to try and avenge her son. Realizing that her tongue was now utterly lifeless, she tried a different type of language. By an astonishing effort of will she managed to galvanize her right hand, raising it slightly from her knee where it always lay inert, and making it crawl very gradually up the table leg in front of her until it lay on the table-cloth. Then she wriggled her fingers feebly to attract the attention of the others.

When the players noticed this white, soft, corpse-like hand in their midst, they were extremely surprised. Grivet paused with his arm in mid-air, just when he was about to lay down a triumphant double six. Since her stroke, the invalid had never once moved her hands.

'Hey, look, Thérèse,' exclaimed Michaud; 'look how

Madame Raquin is moving her fingers ... She must want something.'

Thérèse could not speak; she, like Laurent, had followed the paralytic woman's extreme efforts and was now staring at her hand, chalk-white in the harsh lamplight, an avenging hand that was about to speak. The two murderers waited, holding their breath.

'Good lord, yes, she does want something,' said Grivet; 'we understand each other famously, she and I ... She wants to play dominoes ... Eh? That's right, isn't it, dear lady?'

Madame Raquin made a violent gesture of denial. She stretched out one finger, bent back the others, and, with infinite pains, began to trace out letters on the table. But she had only made a few strokes when Grivet called out in triumph once again:

'I know: she's saying how right I am to play the double six!'

The invalid shot a ferociously scornful glance at the old employee and went back to the word she was trying to write. But Grivet constantly interrupted her, saying that she did not need to go on, he now understood, then putting forward some idiotic explanation. In the end, Michaud told him to keep quiet.

'For heaven's sake, let Madame Raquin speak,' he said. 'Now, what is it you want to tell us, my dear?'

And he looked hard at the table-cloth, much as if he were listening attentively. But the paralytic's fingers were growing tired, for she had had to start the same word more than ten times over, and now they could barely manage it, slipping from side to side. Michaud and Olivier leaned closer, still unable to make it out, and forced her to write the first letters yet again.

'Ah!' Olivier suddenly exclaimed, 'this time, I've got it! She's written your name, Thérèse ... Let's see: Thérèse and ... Go on, dear lady, please finish.'

Thérèse almost cried out in fear. She watched her aunt's fingers sliding over the table-cloth, and it seemed as if they were tracing out her name and denouncing her crime in letters of fire. Laurent had leapt violently to his feet, wondering whether he should not throw himself on the old woman and

break her arm. He was convinced that all was lost, and, as he watched this hand coming back to life to divulge Camille's murder, he felt the chill weight of retribution bearing down on him.

Madame Raquin was still writing, but more and more hesitantly.

'That's right, I can read it clearly now,' Olivier continued a moment later, looking across to the husband and wife. 'Your aunt has written both your names: Thérèse and Laurent . . .'

The old lady made repeated signs of agreement, while giving the two murderers a look which quite crushed them. Then she tried to complete her sentence. But her fingers had gone stiff again, and the extraordinary will-power that had galvanized them was slipping away; she could feel the paralysis creeping back down her arm and taking hold once more of her wrist. She frenziedly traced another word, and Michaud read out:

'Thérèse and Laurent have . . . '

And Olivier asked:

'Yes, but what have they got, these dear children of yours?'

The murderers, now crazed with terror, were on the point of shouting out the end of the sentence. They were staring at the avenging hand with fixed and anguished gaze when, suddenly, it went into a spasm and flattened out on the table, before falling back down into the invalid's lap, like a lump of lifeless flesh. The paralysis had returned and put a stop to their retribution. Michaud and Olivier sat down again in disappointment, while Thérèse and Laurent felt such a stab of joy that they almost collapsed with the sudden rush of blood thumping through their hearts.

Grivet was annoyed that nobody had believed him, and now he thought the time had come to re-establish his reputation for infallibility by completing Madame Raquin's unfinished sentence. As everyone was wondering what it could mean, he intervened:

'It's perfectly clear, I can guess the whole sentence from the look in Madame's eye. I don't need things written out for me on a table, one glance from her is enough. What she meant to say is: "Thérèse and Laurent have taken good care of me."'

Grivet had reason to feel pleased with his powers of imagination, because this time the whole company agreed with him. The guests began to sing the couple's praises for having been so kind to the poor lady.

'It is quite clear', said Michaud gravely, 'that Madame Raquin wished to register her appreciation of the loving care her children are lavishing on her. It reflects most creditably on the whole family.'

And he added, picking up his dominoes again:

'So, let us continue; now, where were we ... Grivet was about to play the double six, I believe.'

Grivet put down the double six and the game proceeded, futile and monotonous.

The old paralytic stared at her hand, plunged in terrible despair; it had let her down. Now it felt as heavy as lead; she would never be able to raise it again. Heaven did not want Camille to be avenged, for it had deprived his mother of her only means of telling the world about his murder. And the poor unfortunate told herself that all she was good for now was to go and join her child under the earth. She lowered her eyelids, feeling herself quite useless, and wishing she were already locked away in the darkness of the grave.

XXVIII

FOR two months Thérèse and Laurent struggled on against the anguish generated by their union. They were the cause of each other's sufferings. Hatred slowly welled up in them both, to the point where they began to look at each other with fury in their eyes, and unspoken menace.

It was inevitable that it would come to hatred in the end. They had loved each other like animals, with the hot passions of the blood; then, in the nervous upheaval following their crime, love had turned to fear and they had felt a physical horror at the thought of their embraces; now, amid the pain of their married life, they were rebelling and constantly flying into tantrums.

Theirs was a terrible hatred, leading to frequent violent outbursts. They could feel that they were irritating each other, and they both felt that they would be able to lead a quiet life without the other's constant presence. When they were together, they each felt stifled by an enormous burden, a burden which they would have liked to push aside and do away with; they would purse their lips and their eyes would light up with thoughts of violence, as the desire to tear each other to pieces overcame them.

Deep inside, the same thought was gnawing away at each of them; they were frustrated with their crime itself, and despairing that it had ruined their lives for good. That was the origin of all their anger. They realized that the ill could not be cured and that they would have to suffer for Camille's murder until they died, and it was this idea of suffering in perpetuity that exasperated them. In the absence of anyone else to blame, they took it out on each other, with detestation.

They were not willing to admit openly that their marriage was the inevitable punishment for the murder; they refused to hear the inner voice which was shouting the truth at them, laying out before their eyes the story of their life. And yet, in their fits of anger, they could each see clearly enough what

lay at the root of their annoyance, and were conscious of the furious egotism of their natures which, having led them into murder in order to satisfy their appetites, had now left them with such a desolate and intolerable existence. They remembered the past and they knew full well that the only thing that gave them any cause for remorse was their disappointed hope of sensual gratification, peace, and happiness; had they been able to enjoy each other's embraces undisturbed, they would certainly not have shed a tear for Camille—they would have grown fat on their crime instead. But their bodies had rebelled, refusing to accept marriage, and now they were wondering fearfully where all the horror and loathing were going to lead them. They could see only an appalling and painful future ahead, leading to a sinister and violent end. And so, like two enemies who had been tied together and were struggling in vain to escape from their enforced embrace, they tensed their muscles and nerves to breaking-point, but without being able to free themselves. Then, realizing that they would never be able to get free, exasperated at the cords biting into their flesh and sickened by their contact with each other, feeling their discomfort grow with each passing hour and forgetting that they themselves had tied the knot that bound them, they flung dreadful accusations at each other in an attempt to alleviate their sufferings; unable to bear their bonds a moment longer, they tried to heal their mutually inflicted wounds by deafening each other with their curses and screams of reproach.

Every evening some quarrel would break out. It was as if the two murderers were looking for an opportunity to let off steam and unwind their tensed-up nerves. They watched each other's slightest move, testing their reactions, probing every exposed wound to the quick, and taking a keen delight in making each other scream with pain. Their life was filled with constant irritations, for they were now so tired of each other that they could not bear the least word, or look, or gesture, without feeling aggrieved and flying off the handle. Their whole being was ready and waiting for violence, and the slightest cause of impatience or the most ordinary annoyance would swell to extraordinary proportions in their deranged organisms, and suddenly become heavy with brutality. The most trivial thing could whip up a storm which went on until the following

day. A dish that was too hot, an open window, a denial or a simple remark was enough to provoke them to real fits of insanity. And at some point in the dispute, one would always fling at the other the name of Camille; then, one thing always led to another until they started blaming each other for the drowning at Saint-Ouen, at which point they really saw red and lost control completely. This led to the most dreadful scenes as, suffocating with rage, they exchanged blows, hurled foul abuse, and committed shameful acts of brutality against each other. It was usually after dinner that Thérèse and Laurent reached this degree of exasperation, locking themselves in the dining-room so that nobody would hear their desperate rowing. There, at the back of that damp, vault-like room lit only by the yellowish glow of the lamp, they could tear each other apart to their hearts' content. In the calm, still air their voices became horribly strident. They only stopped when they were worn out with exhaustion, for it was only then that they were able to enjoy a few hours' rest. Quarrelling became a kind of need for them, a means of achieving sleep by brutalizing their nerves.

Madame Raquin listened to all of this. She would be there the whole time in her chair, her hands hanging down on her knees, her head erect and her face unmoving. She heard everything, but never a shudder ran through her lifeless body; her gaze remained riveted unflinchingly on the two murderers; she must have endured the most appalling torments. In this way she discovered, detail by detail, everything that had happened before and after Camille's murder, and saw deeper and deeper into the disgusting crimes of those whom she had once called her dear children.

The quarrels between the two of them revealed to her all the circumstances, and laid out one by one before her terrified mind all the episodes of the horrible saga. And as she waded further into this bloody mire, she would pray for mercy and think that she had reached the bottom of their infamy, only to be forced to go deeper still. Every evening she found out some fresh detail, and still the awful story went on and on, until she felt as if she had lost her way in some endless, horrifying nightmare. Their first admission of guilt had been devastating and brutal, but she was hurt even more by these

repeated blows, these small details which the couple let slip in their mad frenzy and which cast a truly sinister light on their crime. Daily the mother had to listen to the story of her son's murder, and every day the story became more horrible, more detailed, and was screamed into her ears with even greater violence and brutality.

Sometimes, Thérèse was smitten with remorse as she looked at the pallid mask down which great tears were silently rolling. Then she would point at her aunt and implore Laurent with her eyes to keep quiet.

'What's the problem?' he yelled boorishly. 'You know she can't give us away. D'you think I like it any better than she does? Anyway, we've already got her money, so what does it matter what I say?'

And the dispute would carry on, bitter and violent, killing Camille all over again. Neither Thérèse nor Laurent dared to give in to the impulse which they occasionally felt, to take pity on the paralytic and shut her in her own room when they were fighting, in order to spare her another account of the crime. For they were afraid they would strike each other down if they did not have this semi-corpse to keep them apart. And so pity gave way to cowardice, and they forced unspeakable suffering on Madame Raquin simply because they needed her presence to protect them from their own hallucinations.

Their quarrels were always the same, and always brought them back to the same accusations. As soon as the name of Camille was spoken and one accused the other of having killed him, a terrifying clash would occur.

At dinner one evening Laurent, looking for a pretext to get angry, said that the water in the carafe was warm—warm water made him feel sick and he wanted some that was cool.

'I couldn't get any ice,' Thérèse answered curtly.

'Right then, I shan't have anything at all to drink,' said Laurent.

'It's perfectly good water.'

'It's warm and it tastes of slime. It might as well be river water.'

'River water!' Thérèse repeated.

And she burst into tears, one idea having led to another.

'What are you crying for?' asked Laurent, who knew very

well why and was already turning pale.

'I'm crying', she sobbed, 'because ... You know perfectly well why ... Oh God, oh God! You killed him!'

'That's a lie!' shouted the murderer vehemently. 'Admit it's a lie! I may have pushed him in the Seine, but you put me up to it.'

'Me? Me!'

'Yes you! Don't play the innocent, don't make me beat the truth out of you; I need you to confess to your crime and take your share of the blame, to calm me down and let me have some relief.'

'But it wasn't me who drowned Camille.'

'Yes it most certainly was ... Oh! you can play surprised if you like, and pretend you've forgotten; perhaps I should refresh your memory?'

He got up from the table, went to lean over her, and purple with rage, screamed in her face:

'You were by the edge of the river, remember, and I whispered: "I'm going to push him in." And you agreed, you just got into the boat.'

'It's not true ... I wasn't thinking straight, I don't remember what I did but I never wanted to kill him; you did that, and you alone.'

These denials were a torture to Laurent. As he had said, the idea of having an accomplice was some comfort to him; had he dared, he would have tried to prove to himself that the full horror of the murder should fall on Thérèse. At times he felt like hitting her to make her confess that she was more guilty than he.

He started pacing up and down the room, screaming and raving, watched by the fixed stare of Madame Raquin.

'Ah, the bitch, the bitch!' he spluttered. 'She's trying to drive me mad! You, didn't you come to my room one evening like a whore and drive me wild with your caresses so I would agree to do in your husband? You couldn't stand him—whenever I came here to see you, you told me he stank like a sick child ... Three years ago, what did *I* know about this sort of thing? Was *I* a criminal? I was an honest man leading a quiet life, not doing anyone any harm; I wouldn't have hurt a fly.'

'You're the one who killed Camille,' Thérèse insisted with a desperate obstinacy which made Laurent utterly lose his head.

'No, it was you, I tell you, you!' he repeated with an awful scream. 'Now you be careful, don't get me worked up or it will be the worse for you! What, you miserable slut, you don't remember a thing? You gave yourself to me like a tart, there, in your husband's bedroom, and taught me how to get pleasures that drove me crazy. Admit it, you had it all worked out, you hated Camille and you'd been wanting to kill him for ages! Of course, that's why you took me as your lover, so that we would clash and I'd destroy him.'

'That's not true! It's monstrous, what you're saying! You've no right to hold my weaknesses against me. I can truly say, like you, that before we met I was an honest woman who had never done anyone any harm. If I drove you crazy, you drove me crazier still. Let's not argue, Laurent, do you hear me? I would have too much to say against you.'

'Such as what?'

'Oh, nothing . . . You made no effort to save me from myself, you took advantage of me when I was vulnerable, you enjoyed wrecking my life . . . I can forgive you all that . . . But for pity's sake don't accuse me of killing Camille. Keep your crime to yourself, and don't keep trying to make my life even more awful than it is.'

Laurent raised his arm to slap Thérèse across the face.

'Go on, hit me,' she added; 'I'd prefer that, it would hurt less.'

With that, she offered her face. He held back, then took a chair and sat down beside her.

'Now listen,' he said, trying to keep his voice steady; 'refusing to accept your share of the blame is just cowardice. You know full well we did it together, you know you are as guilty as I am. What makes you want to shift all the responsibility on to me and claim you are innocent? If you were, you would never have agreed to marry me; don't forget, it's two years now since the murder. Would you like to try a little test? I'm going to go and spill the beans to the Public Prosecutor; then you'll see if we aren't both found guilty together!'

They shuddered, and Thérèse went on:

'The world may condemn me, but Camille knows it was all your doing. He doesn't torment me at night as he does you.'

'Camille never bothers me,' said Laurent, pale and trembling; 'you're the one who sees him in your nightmares; I've heard you shouting out in your sleep.'

'Don't say that,' exclaimed Thérèse angrily; 'I've never said anything in my sleep, and I don't want the ghost to come back now. Ah! I understand, you're trying to divert it away from you . . . I am innocent, I am innocent!'

They looked at each other, terrified and exhausted, afraid that they might unwittingly have called up the drowned man's corpse. Their quarrels always ended like that, with them protesting their innocence and trying to deceive themselves in order to drive away their bad dreams. They were forever trying to shrug responsibility for the crime off onto each other and defend themselves as if they were in court, each levelling the most serious charges at the other. The strangest thing was that they never managed to believe in the truth of their own protestations, for they both recalled exactly what had happened and could read tacit admissions in each other's eyes, even when their lips denied everything. Their lies were childish and their claims ridiculous, mere battles of words fought by two pathetic creatures who lied for the sake of lying, unable even to hide the fact that they were lying. Each in turn took the role of accuser and, although their imaginary court case never came to a verdict, they played it out every night with cruel determination. They knew they would prove nothing, they could never erase the past, and yet they kept on trying, charging back into battle, spurred on each time by pain and fear, yet defeated in advance by the terrible reality of the situation. The only profit they gained from their disputes was the storm of shouts and screams, whose din numbed their senses for a while.

And through all their rows, all their accusations, the paralysed old woman's gaze never left them. Her eyes lit up with a glint of joy whenever Laurent raised his broad hand against Thérèse.

XXIX

Now a new phase began. Thérèse, driven to distraction by fear and not knowing where to turn for the slightest consoling thought, began to shed tears for her drowned husband out loud in front of Laurent.

A sudden collapse occurred in her. Her over-stretched nerves snapped and her hard, violent nature softened. She had become over-emotional once before, in the first days of their marriage, and now her emotionalism came back in a kind of necessary and inevitable reaction. Having put all of her nervous energy into the struggle against Camille's ghost, having lived for several months in a state of smouldering irritation and revolt against her sufferings, and having tried to cure them by the strength of her will alone, she suddenly felt so weary that she was forced to bend and give in. Now she went back to being just a woman, a little girl even, and, with no strength left to resist and make a further desperate stand against her terrors, she let herself be swept along by pity, tears, and remorse, in the hope that they would bring her some relief. She tried to turn these weaknesses of mind and body to her advantage; perhaps the drowned man, who had been impervious to her tantrums, would give in to her tears; so this remorse of hers was quite calculated, as probably the best way to placate and satisfy Camille. Like certain devout ladies who think they can deceive God into forgiving them their sins by praying with their lips and adopting the humble pose of the penitent, Thérèse humiliated herself, beat her breast, and found words of repentance, when all she felt deep in her heart was fear and cowardice. Moreover, she took a kind of physical pleasure in letting herself go like this, feeling crushed and powerless and giving herself up unresistingly to grief.

She imposed the burden of her weepy despair on Madame Raquin. The old paralytic became an object for her everyday use, a kind of prayer-stool, a piece of furniture in front of which she could confess her sins without fear and beg for for-

giveness. Whenever she felt the need to cry, to distract herself with sobbing, she would kneel down before the invalid and, choking and exclaiming in passion, act out by herself a remorse scene which allowed her to find relief in weakness.

'I am a vile creature,' she would say in a faltering voice; 'I don't deserve forgiveness. I deceived you, and sent your son to his death. You can never forgive me. But if you could only see what remorse there is now in my heart, if you only knew how I am suffering, perhaps you would have some pity ... No, no pity for me, I wish I could die at your feet, overwhelmed by shame and grief.'

She would go on in this vein for hours at a time, passing from despair to hope, condemning herself and then granting her own pardon; she always put on the voice of a sick little girl, sometimes demanding, sometimes plaintive; she would throw herself down on the floor and then immediately get up again, obeying each new impulse of humility or pride, repentance or defiance, that came into her head. Sometimes she would even forget that she was kneeling in front of Madame Raquin, and go on with her monologue as if in a dream. Once she was thoroughly intoxicated with her own words, she would stagger to her feet in a daze and go down to the shop, calmer and no longer afraid of bursting into nervous sobbing in front of her customers. But whenever a fresh need to repent came over her, she would hurry back upstairs and kneel once more at the invalid's feet. These scenes happened ten times a day.

It never occurred to Thérèse that her tears and displays of remorse must be causing unspeakable distress to her aunt. The truth was that anyone who had wanted to find a way of torturing Madame Raquin could not have invented anything more awful than the comedy of remorse acted out by her niece. She saw through to the selfishness underlying these effusions of grief. The long monologues which she was forced to endure at any moment of the day, and which kept taking her back to Camille's murder, put her through untold misery. She could never forgive, and was nourishing implacable thoughts of revenge made even more acute by her powerless state, yet all day long she had to listen to pleas for forgiveness and humble, cowardly entreaties. She would have liked to reply, some of the things her niece said brought crushing denials rushing to

her throat, but she had to stay silent and let Thérèse plead her case, unable to interrupt her. Her inability either to shout out or to stop up her ears filled her with indescribable torment. And still, one by one, her niece's slow, plaintive phrases filtered into her mind like some interminable chant. It even crossed her mind that the couple were inflicting this torture on her deliberately, out of diabolical cruelty. Her sole means of defence was to shut her eyes as soon as her niece knelt down; even if she still heard what she was saying, she did not have to look at her.

Eventually, Thérèse took her effrontery to the point of kissing her aunt. One day, during a fit of repentance, she pretended to have caught a glimmer of mercy in the old paralytic's eyes; she crawled along on her knees and pulled herself up, shouting frantically: 'You forgive me, you forgive me!'; then she kissed the poor old woman, who could not throw her head back to escape, on her forehead and cheeks. As her lips touched the cold flesh, Thérèse felt extreme revulsion, but thought that this, like her tears and remorse, would be an excellent way of calming her nerves. So she carried on kissing the old lady every day, as both a penance and a relief to herself.

'Oh! how kind you are!' she would sometimes exclaim. 'I can see how touched you are by my tears. Your eyes are full of pity . . . I am saved!'

And she smothered her aunt in caresses, resting her head in her lap, kissing her hands, smiling happily at her and taking care of her with every sign of deep affection. After a while she began to believe that this play-acting was real, and to imagine that Madame Raquin really had forgiven her; then she could talk to her about nothing but how happy her forgiveness had made her.

This was all too much for the paralytic; it almost finished her off. Her niece's kisses gave her the same bitter feeling of disgust and rage that she felt every morning and evening when Laurent picked her up in his arms to get her up or put her to bed. She was obliged to submit to the filthy caresses of the vile creature who had betrayed and killed her son; she could not even raise a hand to wipe away that woman's kisses from her cheeks, and for long hours afterwards she could feel them smarting. In this way she became a plaything for

Camille's murderers, a doll to be dressed and undressed, turned this way and that, and used in accordance with their wishes and whims. She remained lifeless in their hands as if her insides had been full of sawdust, and yet inside her feelings were all still alive, and the slightest contact with Thérèse or Laurent knotted her stomach with anguish and defiance. What exasperated her most was the wicked mockery of her niece's pretending to see forgiveness in her eyes, when she actually wished she could blast her out of existence with a single look. She often made desperate attempts to cry out in protest, and put all her hatred into her eyes. But Thérèse, whom it suited to be able to tell herself twenty times a day that she was forgiven, simply behaved in an even more affectionate way and refused to notice anything. The old lady was forced to accept effusions of gratitude which her heart utterly repudiated. Henceforth, she lived in a constant state of bitter, impotent irritation, with a niece who had made herself thoroughly submissive and kept looking for endearing and affectionate ways to repay her for what she called her heavenly goodness.

Whenever Laurent caught his wife kneeling in front of Madame Raquin, he would drag her roughly to her feet, saying:

'Stop all this play-acting. You don't see me crying and going down on my knees, do you? You're just doing it to annoy me.'

He found Thérèse's remorse strangely unsettling. Since his accomplice had started moping around him, her eyes red with crying and with a plea always on her lips, he had felt much worse. The sight of this walking confession redoubled his fear and further increased his unease; it was like having an eternal reproach lurking about the house. Moreover, he was scared that his wife's repenting urges might one day lead her to tell all. He would have preferred to see her still hard and menacing, and fighting to defend herself against his accusations. But her tactics had changed; she now readily admitted her part in the crime, levelled accusations against herself, made herself compliant and timorous, and then went on to plead for redemption with burning humility in her voice. This attitude annoyed Laurent, and every evening their quarrels became fiercer and more sinister.

'Listen,' Thérèse would say to her husband, 'we are both

terribly guilty, we must repent if we ever want any kind of peace again ... You can see how much calmer I've been since I started weeping. Do the same as me; let us say together that we are being justly punished for committing a terrible crime.'

'Hah!' snorted Laurent, 'you can say what you like. I know how devilishly cunning and two-faced you can be. Cry if it amuses you, but for heaven's sake don't keep going on about it.'

'Oh! you are wicked, you're rejecting your own feelings of remorse. But you're really a coward; you went for Camille when he wasn't looking.'

'You mean to say I'm the only guilty one ?'

'No. That's not what I'm saying. I am guilty too, more guilty than you are; I should have saved my husband from you. Oh! I know the full horror of my guilt, but I am trying to obtain forgiveness, and I shall succeed, Laurent, whereas you'll go on living a life of misery. You haven't even got the heart to spare my poor aunt your disgusting displays of temper, and you have never expressed a word of regret to her.'

With that she kissed Madame Raquin, who shut her eyes. She fussed around her, straightening the pillow behind her head and lavishing a hundred little attentions on her. Laurent was infuriated.

'Hey! Leave her alone', he shouted; 'can't you see she hates the sight of you and your fussing! If she could raise a hand, she'd slap you round the face.'

His wife's measured, plaintive speech and resigned attitude would slowly work him up into a blind fury. He could see easily enough what her tactic was: she wanted to stop making common cause with him and set herself apart, in order to bury herself in her regrets and so escape the embrace of the drowned man. At times he thought that she was perhaps on the right track, that tears of repentance might be a cure for his terrors, and the thought of having to suffer and be afraid on his own certainly made him shudder. He, too, would have liked to feel remorse, or at least pretend to, just to see; but he could not find the right words, or the necessary tears, so he would resort to violence once more and shake Thérèse in an attempt to annoy her and drive her into the same state

of mad fury as himself. She maintained a studied calm, responding with tearful submissiveness to his shouts of rage and making herself all the more humble and contrite as he grew more violent. As always in their rows, Thérèse put the finishing touch to his fury by singing the praises of Camille and intoning a list of his virtues.

'He was such a good man', she said, 'and we must have been horribly cruel to turn against such a kind-hearted fellow, who never had a bad thought.'

'He was good, yes, I know,' sneered Laurent; 'you mean he was stupid, don't you? Or have you forgotten? You used to tell me how the things he said got on your nerves, and how he could never open his mouth without coming out with something idiotic.'

'Don't mock ... All that's missing now is for you to insult the man you murdered ... You know nothing about a woman's heart, Laurent; Camille loved me, and I loved him.'

'You loved him did you, really? Ah! that's a good one! I suppose it was because you loved him so much that you took me for a lover! I can still remember the day when you were crawling all over me and telling me that Camille made you feel sick when your fingers sank into him as if he were made of clay. Oh, I know full well why you fell in love with me: you needed stronger arms than that poor fool could offer you!'

'I loved him as a sister. He was the son of my benefactress, he had all the delicate feelings of someone with a weak constitution, he was always noble and generous, kindly and affectionate ... And we killed him, Oh God! Oh God!'

And she would burst into tears and swoon, while Madame Raquin looked daggers, indignant at hearing Camille's praises sung by such a person. Laurent, powerless against this flood of tears, stalked feverishly up and down trying to find some ultimate means of stifling her remorse. All the good that he kept hearing her speak of his victim ended up by making him deeply worried, for he sometimes let himself be taken in by his wife's heart-rending lamentations and started actually to believe in Camille's virtues, which only served to increase his fears. But what finally made him lose his head and commit acts of real violence was the comparison that the drowned man's widow never failed to make between her first and her second

husband, always to the advantage of the former.

'Oh yes!' she would shout, 'he was better than you; I would much rather he were still alive and you were there in the ground instead.'

At first Laurent would just shrug his shoulders.

'Say what you like,' she went on, becoming more agitated; 'I may not have loved him while he was alive, but when I think back, I love him now ... I love him and I hate you, can't you see that? You, you're a murderer ...'

'Will you shut up!' screamed Laurent.

'... and he's just a victim, an honest man killed by a villain. Oh! You don't frighten me ... You know very well what a petty, brutal wretch you are, with no heart and no soul. How can you expect me to love you now that you're covered in Camille's blood? Camille was all affection for me, and I would kill you, do you hear me? kill you, if that would bring him back and give me his love again.'

'Shut up, you bitch!'

'Why should I? I'm telling the truth. I would buy forgiveness if it cost me your blood. Oh! How I cry and grieve! It's my fault that this swine killed my husband ... I must go, one night, and kiss the ground where he lies; it will be my final joy.'

Laurent, drunk with rage and infuriated by the dreadful pictures that Thérèse kept holding before his eyes, threw himself upon her, knocked her to the ground, and held her down with his knee while raising his fist.

'That's right,' she screamed, 'hit me, kill me ... Camille never lifted a finger to me, but you, you are a monster.'

And Laurent, goaded on by her words, would shake her in his rage, beating and bruising her body with his clenched fist. On two occasions he almost strangled her. She went limp beneath his blows, deriving a bitter pleasure from being hit; she yielded to him and offered herself, provoking him into beating her more harshly still. For her, this was one more remedy for all the suffering in her life, and she slept better at night for having been beaten in the evening. Madame Raquin was filled with exquisite pleasure when Laurent dragged his wife across the floor like this, raining kicks on her back.

The murderer's existence had been unbearable since the

day Thérèse had conceived the hellish idea of expressing her remorse and grief for Camille out loud. From that moment on, the wretched man had lived perpetually with his victim; at any moment of the day he had to listen to his wife praising her first husband and bemoaning her loss. Anything at all could be a pretext: Camille used to do this, Camille used to do that, Camille had such and such a quality, Camille had loved her in such and such a way. Always Camille, always sorrowful phrases and tears of regret for his death. Thérèse put all her vindictiveness into making this torment, which she was inflicting on Laurent to protect herself, as cruel as she could. She went into the most intimate details, told him a thousand trivialities from her childhood with sighs of regret, and so managed to link the drowned man's memory with each and every event in their daily lives. The corpse, which had already been secretly haunting the household, was now brought in explicitly. It sat on the chairs and installed itself at the table, lay on the bed and made use of the furniture, and anything that was lying around. Laurent could not pick up a fork, a brush, or anything else, without Thérèse making him feel that Camille had touched it before him. As he was constantly being brought up against the man he had killed, the murderer began to feel a strange sensation which drove him almost insane: through being constantly compared to Camille, and constantly using the things Camille had used, he imagined that he *was* Camille, and began to identify with his victim. Then his control always snapped and he flung himself at his wife to silence her, so as not to have to listen to her words which were driving him out of his mind. All their quarrels ended in violence.

XXX

THE time came when Madame Raquin, to escape the suffering that she was enduring, had the idea of letting herself starve to death. Her courage was exhausted, she could no longer stand the martyrdom of the murderers' constant presence, and she started dreaming of death as her ultimate release. Every day, whenever Thérèse kissed her or Laurent picked her up and carried her in his arms like a child, her anguish deepened, until she made up her mind to evade these kisses and embraces which were causing her such horror and revulsion. Since she was already insufficiently alive to avenge her son, she preferred to be thoroughly dead and leave nothing in the murderers' hands but a corpse without feeling, which they could treat as they pleased.

For two days she refused all food, summoning her last strength to clench her teeth together, and spitting out whatever they did manage to force into her mouth. Thérèse was at her wits' end, wondering where on earth she would take herself to cry and repent when her aunt was not there any more. She lectured her endlessly to prove that she had to go on living; she wept and even lost her temper, reverting to her rages of the past and forcing the old lady's jaws apart as if she were a recalcitrant animal. But Madame Raquin held firm. It was a disgusting struggle.

Laurent stayed utterly neutral and indifferent to all this. He was very surprised at the frenzy Thérèse put into preventing the invalid's suicide. Now that her presence was of no further use to them, he hoped she would die. He would not have killed her himself, but since she wanted to die anyway, he could see no reason to deny her the means of doing so.

'For heaven's sake leave her alone,' he shouted at his wife. 'It'll be good riddance ... Perhaps we'll be better off when she's gone.'

These words, which were repeated several times in front of her, produced a strange emotional reaction in Madame

Raquin. She began to fear that Laurent's hopes might be realized, and that, once she was dead, the couple might indeed enjoy happy, peaceful times. Then she told herself that wanting to die was cowardly and that she had no right to depart before she had seen the sinister saga through to its resolution. Only then would she be able to slip away into the darkness, and say to Camille: 'You are avenged.' The thought of suicide was hard to bear when she remembered that she would be taking her ignorance with her to the grave; there, in the cold and silent earth, she would lie asleep, tormented for ever by not knowing whether her torturers had been punished. In order to enjoy the sleep of death, she needed to feel the keen joy of vengeance as she passed into insensibility, she needed to take with her a dream of hatred fulfilled which she could dream for all eternity. So she took the food which her niece offered her and consented to live a while longer.

In any case, she could see that the end could not be far off. Every day the situation between husband and wife was becoming more tense and unbearable. At any moment there must come an explosion which would wreck everything. Hour by hour Thérèse and Laurent were squaring up to each other in a more menacing way. It was no longer just at night that they found their enforced proximity a trial; their whole day was spent in an atmosphere of anxiety and dreadful conflict. Everything became a cause of fear and pain to them. They lived in a hell in which they were constantly wounding each other, making everything they said and did as bitter and cruel as possible, trying to push each other over the brink of the precipice which they felt yawning at their feet, and into which they were in fact both already plunging.

The thought of a separation had occurred to them both. They had each dreamed of running away and finding some kind of peace far from the Passage du Pont-Neuf, where the damp and the filth seemed made to go with the barrenness of their lives. But they could not, they dared not flee. The idea of not having each other to tear to pieces, of not suffering and inflicting suffering together, seemed an impossibility to them. They were stubborn in their pursuit of hatred and cruelty. A sort of combined repulsion and attraction simultaneously pushed them apart and bound them together, and

they always felt like two people who, after a row, want to leave each other and yet keep coming back to shout fresh abuse. Then there were material difficulties in the way: they did not know what to do with the invalid, nor what to say to the Thursday guests. If they did run away, perhaps people would suspect something; then they could see themselves being hunted down and sent to the guillotine. So they stayed put out of cowardice, wretchedly dragging out their horrific existence together.

Whenever Laurent was not there, in the morning or afternoon, Thérèse would wander aimlessly between the dining-room and the shop, anxious and disturbed, not knowing how to fill the emptiness which seemed to stretch further ahead of her by the day. Whenever she was not weeping at Madame Raquin's feet, or being beaten and cursed by her husband, she was at a loss for what to do. As soon as she found herself alone in the shop, she would sink into a heavy depression and gaze out at the people walking through the dark and dirty arcade with a dazed expression on her face, feeling utterly dejected in this gloomy tomb with its graveyard stench. In the end she asked Suzanne to come and spend whole days with her, hoping that the poor, pallid creature's gentle presence would make her feel calmer.

Suzanne was delighted to accept her offer; she still liked her and felt a kind of friendly respect for her, and for a long time now she had wanted to come and work with her while Olivier was out at the office. She brought her embroidery along and sat down behind the counter in the place vacated by Madame Raquin.

From that day on, Thérèse began to be less attentive to her aunt. Now that she had something else to occupy her, she went upstairs less often to weep in her lap and kiss her lifeless face. She made an effort to seem interested in Suzanne's interminable chatter about her household problems and all the banal details of her monotonous life; it drew her out of herself, and she was sometimes surprised to find herself taking a real interest in such nonsense, something which later brought a bitter smile to her lips.

Gradually she lost all her regular customers. Since her aunt had been confined to her chair upstairs, she had let the shop go to rack and ruin, abandoning her goods to the dust and

the damp. There was a lingering mouldy smell, spiders hung from the ceiling, and the floor was hardly ever swept. But what really drove the customers away was the strange reception they sometimes received from Thérèse. Whenever she was upstairs being beaten by Laurent, or going through a fit of panic on her own, and the shop bell gave its insistent ring, she had to rush down almost without having time to tie her hair up or wipe away her tears; then she would serve the waiting customer with bad grace, or even save herself the trouble by shouting from the top of the wooden stairs that she had run out of whatever it was they wanted. Such unaccommodating behaviour was not calculated to make people want to come back. The little seamstresses of the locality, accustomed to Madame Raquin's gentle and solicitous manner, ran away in the face of Thérèse's surly attitude and crazed looks. Once she had Suzanne at her side, the exodus became complete, for, in order not to be disturbed in the middle of their conversation, the two women always found a way of getting rid of the last customers who persisted in coming. From then on, the haberdashery business contributed not one penny to the household expenses, so they had to break into the forty-odd thousand francs of capital.

Sometimes Thérèse would go out for whole afternoons at a time. Nobody knew where she was going. She had probably invited Suzanne round not just for the company, but also to mind the shop while she was away. When she returned in the evening, worn out and with black rings of fatigue round her eyes, she would find Olivier's little wife sitting hunched behind the counter, still smiling distantly, in exactly the same position as when she had left her five hours before.

About five months after she was married Thérèse had a terrible shock. She became convinced that she was pregnant. The idea of having a child by Laurent seemed monstrous to her, although she could not explain why. She was vaguely afraid of giving birth to a drowned baby; it was as if she could feel inside her the cold presence of a soft, half-dissolved corpse. So she determined at all costs to get rid of this icy foetus which she could not bear to carry any longer. She said nothing to her husband, then one day, after she had cruelly provoked him and he had raised his foot to kick her, she offered her

stomach to the blow. She allowed herself to be kicked almost to death in that way, and the next day she had a miscarriage.

Laurent too was leading a miserable existence. The days all seemed unbearably long to him, and each one brought the same anguish, the same depressing boredom, which came over him at particular times with devastating regularity and monotony. So his life dragged on; every evening he was terrified by memories of the past day and by expectations of the one to come. He knew that from now on all his days would be the same, all bring him an equal dose of pain. And he could see the weeks, months, and years which stretched ahead of him, grim and implacable, waiting to fall on him in turn and gradually smother the life out of him. When the future is without hope, the present tastes appallingly bitter. Laurent had lost all his defiance; he was letting himself go and starting to slide into the void which already threatened to overwhelm him. Idleness was killing him. As soon as day broke he would leave home, with no idea where he was going, sickened at the thought of doing the same thing as the day before and yet forced to do it again despite himself. He always made for his studio, as a matter of habit, or obsession. This room with its grey walls, where the only view was a blank square of sky, filled him with gloom and despair. He would fling himself face down on the divan and just lie there with his arms dangling, thinking leaden thoughts. He no longer dared pick up a brush. He had made a number of fresh attempts, but each time the face of Camille started leering at him from the canvas. To avoid sliding into insanity he ended up flinging his paintbox away into a corner and deciding to do nothing at all. He found this enforced idleness unbelievably hard to bear.

In the afternoon he would wonder frantically what to do with himself. He often spent half an hour standing around on the pavement in the Rue Mazarine, hesitating and turning over in his mind the various distractions he could indulge in. Having rejected the idea of going back up to his studio, he would set off down the Rue Guénégaud and then stroll along the embankment. And until evening he would go wherever his feet took him, walking along in a daze and shuddering suddenly when his gaze fell upon the Seine. Whether he was up in his studio or down in the street, he was always equally

depressed. The next day he would start all over again, spending the morning lolling on his divan and the afternoon walking up and down the embankment. This had been going on for months, and it might go on for years more.

Laurent occasionally reflected that he had killed Camille in order to lead a life of idleness afterwards, and he was always astonished to find, now that he was actually doing nothing, what misery he was going through. He would have liked to force himself to be happy; he proved to himself that he was wrong to be unhappy, that he had actually attained the ultimate in happiness, which is to sit back with arms folded and do nothing, and that he was a fool for not enjoying this felicity in peace. But his reasoning did not stand up to the reality of the situation. He was forced to admit in his heart of hearts that idleness made his torment even worse, because it left him all the hours of the day to contemplate his despair and appreciate to the full its incurable awfulness. Idleness, this animal-like existence which he had so coveted, had become his punishment. There were moments when he longed earnestly for an occupation to take him away from his own thoughts. But then he always let himself drift again, falling back under the influence of that inexorable fatality which had fettered his limbs, the more surely to crush him.

The truth was that his only relief came from beating Thérèse of an evening, which allowed him to throw off his painful sluggishness for a while.

His most acute suffering, both physical and moral, came from the bite in the neck that Camille had given him. There were moments when it seemed to him as if the scar covered the whole of his body. Whenever he forgot about the past for a moment, he would feel a stabbing pain which brought both his mind and his body back to the murder. He could never stand in front of a mirror without something happening which he had often noticed, but which still horrified him: driven by the emotion he was feeling, the blood would rush to his neck, turn the scar deep red, and make it eat into his skin. This wound, which was living on him like a parasite, coming alive, reddening, and gnawing him at the slightest sign of emotion, caused him much fear and was a real torment. In the end, he started to believe that the drowned man's teeth had

actually buried some animal there in his neck which was devouring him. The part where the scar was did not seem to belong to his body any longer; it was like a piece of foreign flesh that had simply been stuck on, like a chunk of poisoned meat which was rotting his own muscle away. Thus he carried around with him everywhere he went a living, devouring reminder of his crime. Whenever he was beating Thérèse, she would try and scratch him there, and sometimes succeed in digging her nails in, which made him scream with pain. Normally, she pretended to cry whenever she saw the scar, so as to make it even more unbearable to Laurent. Of all her brutalities towards him, using this bite as a way to hurt him gave her the greatest sense of revenge.

Many times when shaving, he had been tempted to cut into his neck to try and remove the marks left by the drowned man's teeth. In front of the mirror, when he raised his chin and caught sight of the red patch showing through the foamy white lather, he would suddenly be filled with rage and bring the razor up close, on the point of chopping straight into the flesh. But the cold feel of the blade on his skin always brought him to his senses, and then he would go weak at the knees and have to sit down, until the balance of his cowardly nature was restored and he could finish his shave.

He only ever shook off his sluggishness of an evening, when he flew into blind, childish rages. When he was tired of quarrelling with Thérèse and beating her, he would start acting like a child, kicking the walls and looking for something to smash. All this brought him relief. He particularly hated François the tabby cat, who rushed to take refuge in the invalid's lap as soon as he saw Laurent coming. The only reason Laurent had not killed him already was that he really did not dare touch him. The cat looked at him with great round eyes, unmoving and diabolical. It was these constantly staring eyes that exasperated him and made him wonder what they wanted, until in the end he became really scared and started imagining the most absurd things. If he chanced to turn his head suddenly and caught François scrutinizing him with his heavy, implacable look, something which could happen at any moment, at table, in the middle of a quarrel, or even during a long silent pause, he would turn pale, lose his head, and be on

the point of shouting at the cat: 'Hey you! Say something, tell me what it is you want.' Whenever he had an opportunity to step on one of his paws or his tail, he would do so with a joy that quite scared him, and the poor creature's squeals always left him feeling vaguely uneasy, as if it had been a human cry of pain. He was literally afraid of François. Particularly since the cat had taken to living on Madame Raquin's lap, as in some impregnable fortress from which he could train his green eyes on the enemy with impunity, Laurent had begun to notice a strange similarity between the angry creature and the paralysed old woman. He told himself that, like her, the cat knew all about the crime, and would denounce him if the day ever came when he could speak.

Finally, one evening François stared so fixedly at Laurent that, overwhelmed with fury, he decided that enough was enough. He opened the dining-room window wide, then came over and picked the cat up by the scruff of its neck. Madame Raquin realized what was going to happen; two great tears rolled down her cheeks. The cat began to spit and tensed itself, trying to roll over and bite Laurent's hand. But he held on, then whirled it round his head a couple of times and flung it with all the strength in his arm against the great black wall opposite. François smashed into the wall and fell, crushed to pieces, on to the glass roof of the passage. The whole night long the wretched creature dragged itself along the gutter, its back broken, screeching raucously in pain. That night, Madame Raquin mourned François almost as much as she had Camille, and Thérèse had a bad attack of nerves. The cat's moans were sinister, in the darkness just beneath the windows.

Soon, Laurent had something else to worry about. He became concerned at certain changes he had noticed in his wife's behaviour.

Thérèse had become sullen and taciturn. She no longer lavished effusions of repentance and grateful kisses on Madame Raquin; she had gone back to her coldly cruel, selfishly indifferent behaviour towards the paralysed old lady. It was as if she had tried out remorse and found that it did nothing to relieve her, and so had decided to have a go at some other remedy. No doubt her sadness derived from an inability to bring any

calm into her life. She regarded the old lady with a kind of disdain, like a useless object which could no longer even serve as a consolation. She only took as much care of her as was necessary to stop her dying of hunger. From that moment on, she dragged herself around the house, silent and depressed; she also took to going out increasingly often, sometimes as much as four or five times a week.

These changes surprised and alarmed Laurent. He thought that remorse was now taking a different form in Thérèse, manifesting itself in the gloom and apathy which he had noticed in her. This apathy seemed to him much more worrying than the garrulous despair which she had inflicted on him in the past. Now she hardly ever spoke, and no longer argued with him, but seemed to keep it all bottled up inside her. He would rather have listened to her pouring out her suffering until she had finished, than see her withdrawn into herself like this. He was scared that her inner anguish would one day so overwhelm her that, to gain release, she would go and tell the whole story to a priest or a magistrate.

So Thérèse's frequent outings took on a terrifying significance for him. He imagined that she was looking for someone outside in whom to confide, and was preparing to betray him. Twice he attempted to follow her, but lost her in the narrow streets. He took to spying on her again. An obsessive thought had taken hold of him: driven to extremes by what she was going through, Thérèse was going to give the game away, and he had to gag her and stop the confession in her throat.

XXXI

One morning, instead of going up to his studio, Laurent installed himself in a bar at the corner of the Rue Guénégaud, opposite the arcade. From there he examined all the people emerging on to the pavement of the Rue Mazarine. He was watching for Thérèse. The day before, she had told him that she would be going out early and would not be back until evening.

He waited for a full half hour. He knew that his wife always left by the Rue Mazarine, although for one moment he thought she might have given him the slip by taking the Rue de Seine, and it occurred to him to go back into the arcade and hide in the side-passage next to the house itself. Just as he was becoming restless, Thérèse hurried out of the arcade. The clothes she was wearing were colourful, and for the first time he noticed that in her long dress with a train she looked like a prostitute, flouncing provocatively along the pavement, eyeing up the men and gathering up the front of her skirt so high that she was showing off all her legs, from her laced boots to her white stockings. She set off up the Rue Mazarine. Laurent followed.

It was a pleasant day and the young woman walked slowly along, her head held high and her hair trailing down her back. Men who had seen her from the front would turn round as she passed and look at her again from behind. She went down the Rue de l'École-de-Médecine.* Laurent was terrified; he knew that there was a police station somewhere in the neighbourhood, and he was quite convinced that his wife was going to denounce him. So he promised himself that he would rush up to her if she went in through the door, that he would plead with her, hit her, and force her to keep quiet. On one street corner she looked at a passing policeman, and he started shaking when he saw her approach him; he hid in a doorway, suddenly terrified of being arrested on the spot if he showed himself. This walk was becoming a real torment to him; while

his wife enjoyed the sunshine, nonchalantly and immodestly trailing her skirts along the pavement, he came along behind, pale and trembling, telling himself over and over again that all was lost, that there was no escape, that he would be sent to the guillotine. Every step she took seemed to him like a step towards retribution. Fear gave him a sort of blind certainty, and each of the young woman's movements added to it. And so he followed her, going wherever she went, like a man walking to his death.

Suddenly, as she emerged on to the former Place Saint-Michel,* Thérèse made for a cafe which at that time stood at the corner with the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince.* There she sat down at one of the tables on the pavement, in the midst of a group of women and students. She shook hands with everyone in a friendly way and ordered an absinthe.

She seemed quite at ease as she chatted to a fair-haired young man who seemed to have been waiting for her there for some time. Two tarts came and leaned over the table, and started talking familiarly to her in their husky voices. All around her there were women smoking cigarettes and men kissing women on the street, in full view of the passers-by, who did not even turn their heads. Laurent could hear their swearing and their ribald laughter from the other side of the square, where he was standing motionless in a doorway.

When Thérèse had finished her absinthe, she stood up, took the fair-haired young man's arm, and set off down the Rue de la Harpe.* Laurent followed them to the Rue Saint-André-des-Arts,* where he saw them go into a lodging-house. He stood in the middle of the road, looking up at the façade of the building. His wife appeared momentarily at an open window on the second floor; he thought he could make out the fair-haired young man's hands slipping around her waist. Then the window slammed shut.

Laurent realized what was going on. Without waiting any longer, he went calmly on his way, happy and reassured.

'Well!' he said, as he went back down to the embankment, 'I'm glad it's only that. At least it gives her something to do, and stops her creating trouble . . . She's a damned sight more sensible than me.'

What he found astonishing was that he had not been the

first to think of embarking on a career of vice; it might be a good cure for his terror. It had not occurred to him before, because all the life had gone out of his flesh, and he no longer felt the slightest inclination to debauchery. His wife's infidelity left him utterly cold, and he felt no combative upsurge of the blood or the nerves at the thought of her being in another man's arms. On the contrary, he found it rather amusing; he felt as if he had been following a friend's wife, and he laughed at the fine trick she was playing on her husband. Thérèse had become so estranged from him that she was no longer alive in his heart at all, and he would happily have sold her into crime a hundred times over to buy himself an hour's peace of mind.

He began strolling along, savouring the sudden and joyful reaction that the switch from horror to reassurance had brought. He was almost grateful to his wife for going to visit a lover when he had thought she was on her way to the police. The whole adventure had turned out in a quite unexpected way, which had been an agreeable surprise. The clearest lesson from the whole thing was that he had been wrong to be afraid, and that he ought to look for a taste of vice himself, to see whether it might not bring him some relief by stupefying his mind.

That evening, as he returned to the shop, Laurent resolved to demand several thousand francs from his wife, and stop at nothing to get them. He reflected that promiscuity was expensive for a man, and felt vaguely envious of whores who can make money by selling their bodies. He waited patiently for Thérèse, who was not yet back. When she arrived, he was all charm and said nothing about having spied on her that morning. She was a little tipsy, and her dishevelled clothes were full of that reek of tobacco and strong drink which always lingers in bars. Shattered, with her face covered in livid blotches, she was unsteady on her feet and clumsy with the shameful fatigue of her day's work.

Dinner was silent. Thérèse ate nothing. When it came to dessert, Laurent propped his elbows on the table and demanded five thousand francs, straight out.

'No,' she snapped. 'If I let you have your way, we'd soon be completely broke . . . Don't you know how we stand? You'd

be plunging us straight into poverty.'

'Maybe,' he said in an unconcerned voice, 'I don't care, I just want the money.'

'No, a thousand times no! You chucked in your job, the drapery business has gone right down, and we can hardly live on the interest on my dowry! Every day I have to break into the capital just to feed you and give you the hundred francs a month that you extort from me. You're not having any more, do you hear me?'

'Just think about it, don't refuse point blank; I tell you, I want five thousand francs, and I'll get it, and you're going to give it to me whatever you say.'

His calm insistence annoyed Thérèse and took away the last bit of clarity from her thinking.

'Ah! I see,' she shouted, 'you want to finish just as you began ... For four years now we've been providing for you. You only ever came round to fill yourself with food and drink, and since then you've carried on sponging off us. His Lordship does nothing all day, his Lordship has fixed it so that he can live at my expense, without lifting a finger ... No, you shan't have a thing, not one penny ... Do you want me to tell you what you are? All right, you're a ...'

And she swore horribly. Laurent laughed and shrugged his shoulders, simply replying:

'You've picked up some delightful expressions in the circles you move in nowadays.'

That was the only allusion he allowed himself to Thérèse's amorous exploits. She straightened her head and retorted snidely:

'At least I don't go with murderers.'

Laurent turned very pale. He remained silent for a moment, his eyes riveted on his wife. Then he said, in an unsteady voice:

'Listen, my girl, let's not get upset; there's no point, either for you or for me. I'm at the end of my tether. The sensible thing for both of us would be to come to an understanding, if we don't want something dreadful to happen to us. I asked for five thousand francs because that is what I need; I can even say that I intend to use it to guarantee us a peaceful existence.'

A peculiar smile came to his lips as he continued:

'Come now, think about it, what do you say?'

'No need to think about it,' she replied. 'I've already told you, you're not having a penny.'

Her husband rose abruptly to his feet. She was afraid he was going to hit her, so she hunched herself into a ball, determined not to give in to his blows. But Laurent did not even go near her; he merely contented himself with declaring coldly that he was fed up with life and was going to tell the whole story of the murder to the local police.

'You've driven me to distraction,' he said; 'you're making my existence a misery. I'd rather end it all now. We'll both be tried and condemned together, that's all there is to it.'

'Do you think you can scare me?' his wife shouted. 'I'm as tired of it all as you are. If you don't go to the police, I shall, so there! I'm quite ready to follow you to the scaffold; I'm not so much of a coward as you are. Come on then, let's go straight round to the police.'

She was already on her feet and heading for the stairs.

'Er, all right,' Laurent stammered nervously, 'let's go together.'

But once they were down in the shop they stood staring at each other, scared and hesitant. It was as if they were glued to the spot. The few seconds it had taken them to walk down the stairs had been enough to show them in a flash what the consequences of a confession would be. Both of them simultaneously saw gendarmes, prison, court-room, and guillotine pass quickly and distinctly before their eyes. And they felt, deep down, a weakening which made them want to throw themselves at each other's feet and plead with each other not to go, not to give the game away. Fear and embarrassment held them rooted there for two or three minutes in silence. It was Thérèse who finally resolved to say something, and gave in.

'After all,' she said, 'it's silly of me to quarrel with you about that money. Sooner or later you'll find a way of wasting it all for me anyway. I might as well let you have it straightaway.'

She made no further attempt to disguise her defeat, but sat down at the counter and signed him a credit note for five thousand francs which he could cash at the bank. Nothing

more was said that evening about going to the police.

As soon as Laurent had the money in his pocket, he got drunk, went off whoring, and generally gave himself up to a noisy and dissolute life. He stayed out all night and slept all day, wandering about in the dark looking for thrills and trying to escape from reality. But he only succeeded in making himself more depressed. When he was surrounded by shouting and laughter, he only heard the great awful silence inside himself; when he was in the arms of a mistress, or downing glass after glass, the sating of his appetite merely left him with a leaden sadness. His days of debauchery and gluttony were behind him, for his whole being, which had become frigid and numb within, now found kissing and feasting a source of irritation. Already disgusted before he began, he was never able to work up his imagination and excite his senses or his appetite. By forcing himself into debauchery he simply made himself feel a little worse, and that was all. Then, when he came home and saw Madame Raquin and Thérèse sitting there, his tiredness laid him open to dreadful attacks of terror, and he would swear never to go out again, but to live with his suffering instead, and try to get used to it and overcome it.

Thérèse, for her part, was going out less and less. For a month she lived like Laurent, on the streets and in cafés. She would go home for a while in the evening to feed Madame Raquin and put her to bed, then go out again until the next day. On one occasion she and her husband went for four days without seeing each other. Then she was overcome with deep loathing and realized that vice did not suit her any better than her play-acted remorse. In vain had she hung around all the lodging-houses of the Latin Quarter, in vain had she led a life of indecency and disorder. Her nerves were completely shattered; debauchery and physical pleasure could no longer shake her out of herself violently enough to make her forget. She was like a drunkard whose scorched palate has become so insensitive that even the strongest alcohol has no effect. She lay there unmoved while making love, and no longer expected anything but boredom and fatigue from her lovers. So she left them all, realizing that they were no use to her. Despairing idleness came over her and she took to hanging

around at home in an unwashed petticoat, her hair uncombed, her face and hands dirty; she was losing herself in slovenliness.

And so, when the two murderers found themselves face to face once more, worn out and having exhausted every possible means of escaping from each other, they realized that they did not have the strength to carry on struggling any longer. Debauchery had rejected them and had flung them back into their agonies. They returned once more to their damp and gloomy lodgings in the arcade, and from now on that was their prison, for they had repeatedly tried to escape but never managed to break the bloody bonds that held them to each other. Now they gave up any thought of attempting the impossible. They felt so strongly driven, squeezed, and shackled together by their situation that any attempt to rebel would be futile; they went back to living together, but their hatred for each other had turned into raving fury.

Their evening rows began again—in fact, the shouts and kicks now went on throughout the day. Hatred was now accompanied by suspicion, and suspicion finally drove them completely mad.

They became afraid of each other. Soon, the scene that had followed the demand for the five thousand francs was repeated morning and night. Each became obsessed with the idea that the other was going to denounce them, and they could not get away from this idea. When one of them said or did something, the other imagined that he or she was planning to go to the police. So they fought, or pleaded with each other. They would shout out in their anger that they were going to tell all, scaring each other to death, then tremble and take it all back, promising each other with bitter tears to keep silent. They were going through dreadful torment, but they did not have the courage to administer a proper cure by cauterizing the wound with a red-hot iron. If they kept threatening to confess, it was simply in order to terrify each other and drive all such thoughts from their minds, for they would never have had the strength to speak up and find peace in retribution.

More than twenty times they went as far as the police station door, one behind the other. Sometimes it was Laurent who was determined to own up to the murder, sometimes Thérèse

who was in a hurry to turn herself in. But always they would meet up again in the street outside and, after exchanging insults and pleading earnestly with each other, make up their minds to wait a little longer.

Each fresh row left them more suspicious and timorous than before.

They spied on each other from morning to night. Laurent never left the flat in the arcade, for Thérèse would not let him go out alone. Their suspicions and their dread of possible revelations brought them together and united them in a horrible intimacy. Never, since their marriage, had they lived so tightly bound to each other, and never had they suffered so much. But despite the anguish which they imposed on each other, they never took their eyes off one another, preferring to endure the most extreme pain rather than be apart for an hour. If Thérèse went down to the shop, Laurent would follow her for fear of what she might tell a customer; if Laurent stood in the doorway, watching people walking through the arcade, Thérèse would station herself beside him to make sure he did not speak to anyone. On Thursday evenings, when the guests were there, the murderers would give each other pleading looks, each listening in terror to what the other was saying, each expecting to hear some admission of guilt and reading compromising meanings into every new sentence that the other began.

Such a state of war could not go on much longer.

Thérèse and Laurent both came round independently to the idea of escaping from the consequences of their first crime by committing a second. One of them absolutely had to disappear if the other was to find any peace. This thought occurred to them both at the same time; each felt the urgent necessity of a separation, and each became intent on making it an eternal one. The idea of murder which came into their heads seemed natural, inevitable, a necessary consequence of the murder of Camille. They did not even debate it in their own minds; they accepted it as the only plan that would save them. Laurent decided to kill Thérèse because she was an embarrassment to him, because a word from her could destroy him, and because she was making him go through unbearable torment; Thérèse decided to kill Laurent for the same reasons.

The firm decision to commit another murder calmed them down somewhat. They each made their arrangements. They were acting in the heat of the moment, without taking proper precautions; they only gave vague thought to the probable consequences of a murder done without any guarantee of escape or means of avoiding punishment. They were each simply obeying their overwhelming urge to kill, in the manner of wild beasts. Nothing could have made them confess to their first crime which they had concealed so cunningly, yet they were going to risk the guillotine for a second which it never occurred to them to make any attempt to hide. This was a contradiction in their behaviour which they never even noticed. They simply assumed that, if they managed to get away, they would go and live abroad with the money. Two or three weeks earlier Thérèse had withdrawn the last few thousand francs of her dowry and was keeping it in a drawer which Laurent knew all about. Not for one moment did they consider what would become of Madame Raquin.

A few weeks before, Laurent had bumped into one of his old school friends, who was then working as a laboratory assistant for a famous chemist and expert in toxicology. This friend had shown him round the laboratory where he worked, pointing out the different bits of apparatus and telling him the names of the drugs. One evening, after he had made up his mind to murder Thérèse, she was drinking a glass of sugared water in front of him, and this reminded him of having seen in the laboratory a little stoneware bottle containing prussic acid. Recalling what the young assistant had told him about the terrible effects of this poison, which kills instantly but leaves few traces, it occurred to him that this was just what he needed. The next day he managed to slip out, went to see his friend, and, while his back was turned, stole the bottle.

That same day Thérèse took advantage of Laurent's absence to have sharpened a long kitchen knife which was used for breaking up loaf sugar and had lost its edge; she hid this in a corner of the sideboard.

XXXII

THE following Thursday the party at the Raquins' (as the guests persisted in calling their hosts) was a particularly jolly affair. It went on until half past eleven. As he was leaving, Grivet declared that he had never in his life spent such a pleasant few hours.

Suzanne, who was pregnant, spoke to Thérèse the whole time about her pains and joys. Thérèse pretended to listen with great interest; with her eyes staring straight ahead and her lips pursed, she occasionally nodded her head and her eyelids cast shadows right across her face as they closed. Laurent, for his part, listened intently to the stories old Michaud and Olivier were telling. These two went on and on, and Grivet was hardly able to get a word in edgeways between two sentences from father and son, though in any case he had a certain respect for them, as he regarded them as good conversationalists. Since the customary game had been replaced that evening by chat, he exclaimed naïvely that the ex-superintendent's conversation was almost as diverting as a game of dominoes.

In the almost four years since Michaud and Grivet had been spending Thursday evenings at the Raquins', they had never once grown tired of these monotonous functions which came round with annoying regularity. Never for one moment had they suspected what a drama was going on in this home which, whenever they arrived, was always so pleasant and peaceful. Olivier usually said, as his little policeman's joke, that in the dining-room there was a whiff of honesty in the air. Grivet, not wanting to be outdone, had called it the Temple of Peace. Two or three times in recent weeks Thérèse had explained away the blotches and bruises on her face by telling the guests that she had had a fall. But in any case, not one of them would have recognized the marks of Laurent's fist; they were all convinced that the two of them were a model couple, all gentleness and love.

The old paralytic had not made any further attempt to bring

to their notice the infamies concealed behind the dull and tranquil façade of these Thursday evenings. In the face of the destructive conflict between the murderers, and sensing the crisis that must burst upon them one day or another under the inevitable pressure of events, she had finally realized that the situation had no need of her. From then on she deliberately withdrew into the background and allowed the consequences of Camille's murder to unfold towards the deaths, in their turn, of the murderers. She simply prayed heaven to let her live long enough to witness the violent outcome that she could now foresee; her last wish was to feast her eyes on the spectacle of the supreme agonies which would finally mark the destruction of Thérèse and Laurent.

That evening Grivet came over to sit next to her and chatted for a long time, as usual both asking and answering all the questions. But he did not manage to get even a glance out of her. When the clock struck half past eleven, the guests all jumped to their feet.

'We are so happy in your house', Grivet exclaimed, 'that we never dream of leaving.'

'It's a fact', said Michaud in confirmation, 'that I'm never sleepy here, although I normally go to bed at nine.'

Olivier felt that it was his turn to say something funny.

'You see,' he said, displaying his yellow teeth, 'there's such a whiff of honesty in the air; that's why we're always so comfortable here.'

Grivet, annoyed at having been pre-empted, began declaiming with an emphatic gesture:

'This room is the Temple of Peace . . . '

Meanwhile, Suzanne was tying her bonnet strings and saying to Thérèse:

'I'll come round tomorrow morning at nine.'

'No,' Thérèse replied hastily, 'no, don't come until the afternoon . . . I'll probably be out all morning.'

As she spoke, her voice was strangely troubled. She accompanied the guests out into the arcade; Laurent went down too, carrying a lamp. Once they were alone, husband and wife both gave a sigh of relief; they must have been eaten up with concealed impatience right through the evening. Since the day before, they had been behaving in a darker, more anxious way

towards each other. Now they avoided looking at each other and went back upstairs in silence. Their hands were shaking in a slightly convulsive way, and Laurent was forced to put the lamp down on the table so as not to drop it.

Before putting Madame Raquin to bed, they usually tidied the dining-room, prepared some sugared water for the night, and busied themselves doing things for the old woman, until everything was ready.

That evening, once they were back upstairs, they sat down for a moment and stared into the distance, their lips pale.

'Well then, aren't we going to go to bed?' asked Laurent after a short silence, seeming to have jolted awake out of a dream.

'Yes, yes, let's go to bed,' answered Thérèse with a shiver, as though she were freezing cold.

She rose and picked up the water jug.

'Let me,' exclaimed her husband in as natural a voice as he could manage; 'I'll make the sugared water; you see to your aunt.'

He took the jug from Thérèse's hands and poured out a glass of water. Then, half turning away, he emptied the little stoneware bottle into it and added a lump of sugar. Meanwhile, Thérèse had bent down in front of the sideboard, picked up the kitchen knife, and was trying to slip it into one of the large pockets that hung from her waist.

Just then that strange feeling which warns us of approaching danger made husband and wife instinctively turn their heads. They looked at each other. Thérèse saw the little bottle in Laurent's hand and he noticed the glint of the knife between the folds of her skirt. They stared at each other like this for a few seconds, chilled and speechless, he standing near the table, she half kneeling by the sideboard. They understood. Each was frozen with horror at finding his own thought in the mind of the accomplice; each read the secret intention on the other's devastated face, and both were filled with pity and horror.

Madame Raquin, sensing that the end was near, gazed at them with a fixed, piercing stare.

Suddenly, Thérèse and Laurent burst into tears. An overwhelming crisis broke them and flung them into each other's

arms, as weak as children. They both felt something gentle and tender awakening in their bosom. They cried, unable to speak, thinking of the sordid life they had led and would go on leading, if they were cowardly enough to go on at all. Then, as they thought back over the past, they felt so weary and disgusted with themselves that they were filled with an immense need for rest, for oblivion. They exchanged a final glance, a glance of gratitude, before the knife and the glass of poison. Then Thérèse took the glass, drank half of it, and handed it to Laurent, who swallowed the rest straight down. Instantly they fell on top of each other, struck down as if by a thunderbolt, finding consolation at last in death. The young woman's mouth fell across her husband's neck, on the scar left by Camille's teeth.

The two bodies remained on the dining-room floor all night long, twisted and slumped in death, lit by the flickering yellow glow of the shaded lamp. And for more than twelve hours, until around noon the following day, Madame Raquin, stiff and silent, contemplated them there at her feet, feasting her eyes and annihilating them with the hatred in her gaze.

BOOK II
MADELEINE FERAT
CHAPTER ONE

GUILLAUME and Madeleine got out at Fontenay halt. It was a Monday, and the train had been almost empty. Five or six other passengers, local folk returning, pressed together to the exit with the young couple and, once through, hurried off in various directions, without a glance at the scene, just people in a hurry to get back.

Outside the station, the young man offered his companion his arm, as formally as if they were still in the streets of Paris. Turning to the left, they made their way slowly up that wonderful avenue of trees which runs from Sceaux to Fontenay. As they went they saw the train move on, deep in its cutting, with many a re-echoing chuff and puff. When at last it had vanished completely in the greenery, Guillaume turned to the girl with a smile.

"Don't forget," he said, "I told you, I don't know these parts at all. I haven't a notion where we are going."

"Let's take this path," was Madeleine's reply. "Then we can miss Sceaux altogether."

They took the lane leading to Champs-Girard, along which the curtain of trees of the great avenue suddenly breaks, to reveal the slopes of Fontenay, gardens and rectangles of paddock out of which tower lofty poplars below, and above, the arable land, barring the landscape with browns and greens and at the very top of the ridge the squat houses of the village showing white through the foliage. Towards the end of September, between four and five, the setting sun makes this corner of country very lonely, and the young couple instinctively halted to gaze at the verdure, so dark green it was almost black with the faint gilding of autumn's first ruddy hues. There was not a soul about.

Still arm in arm, between them they felt that slight embarrassment of a new intimacy which has developed too quickly. When they reminded themselves that they had known each other almost a week, they felt a sort of discomfort at being thus alone like happy lovers, miles from anywhere. Feeling still strangers though already such close friends, they were almost afraid to look at each other, and afraid to speak, lest they should involuntarily offend each other. They were unknown quantities to one another, such unknowns as

both frighten and attract. In their lingering sweethearts' gait, in the trivial, sweet words they exchanged, even in the smiles they gave each other whenever their eyes met, could be seen the uneasiness and embarrassment of a couple whom a sudden shock of chance has brought together. Guillaume had never expected his first love affair to be such a distressing business, and was awaiting the inevitable climax with real anguish.

They had resumed their walk, glancing from time to time at the slopes opposite and breaking their silence only with fragments of conversation bearing no relation to their real thoughts, but all about such things as the trees or the sky or the landscape before them.

Madeleine was nearly twenty. She was wearing a very simple grey woollen frock trimmed with blue. A tiny circlet of straw for hat set off her magnificent shock of auburn hair, which, glinting like the autumn woodland, was coiled at her nape into a tremendous bun. She was a fine-looking young woman, tall, her lissom, powerful body revealing unusual vigour. Her features were striking. The upper part of the face was almost masculine, hard in the firmness of its lines; the temples, nose and cheek-bones revealed the outlines of the skull beneath, lending her countenance the solidity and chill of a marble statue. Embedded in this stern mask were large, wide-staring grey-green eyes which were lifeless, except for moments when her smile sent deep fire flashing through them. By contrast, the lower part of her face was of rare delicacy. There was a voluptuous softness in the contour of the cheeks and at the corners of her mouth, where faint dimples lurked, and beneath the finely-drawn, highly-strung chin the throat was well-fleshed and soft. Not a line here was hard or tensed, everything instead soft, supple, mobile, with peach-like bloom and a thousand ever-changing planes of light. In the hollows of her face where the skin was free of down, it was of admirable fineness, and in this face were set rather full lips, vividly scarlet lips. Indeed they were too red for a face so white

It was an unusual countenance, at once stern and childish. When the lower portion slept or the lips were pursed in a moment of reflection or in anger, all one saw was the hard forehead, the tense ridge of the nose, the sombre eyes, and it was then a mask all solidity and strength. But the instant a smile parted her lips, the upper portion of her countenance seemed to soften, and then all one was conscious of was the soft outline of cheeks and chin, as if the laughter of a little girl of six were set in the face of a grown woman. Her skin

was milky white and transparent, the only blemish a few freckles in the upper corners, at the temples, and the blood which suffused that satin surface faintly tinged the whiteness with blue.

Often enough Madeleine's usual expression, as it were one of uncouth pride, would dissolve suddenly into a glance of inexpressible tenderness, the tenderness moreover of womanly weakness, of a woman subdued. Now, too, following this narrow track on Guillaume's arm, she had moments of gravity which the young man found particularly distressing, especially since they alternated suddenly with those impulsive phases when, as if against her will, she yielded to the moment in a way which raised his hopes. Her solid, slightly swaying gait showed clearly that she had left her maidenhood behind her.

Guillaume was five years Madeleine's senior. He was a tall, thin young man of aristocratic air. With its fined-down features, his elongated face would have been ugly had it not been for the clarity of the skin and the loftiness of the forehead. His whole countenance revealed the brainy but weakened tail end of a vigorous line. Occasionally he would involuntarily give a sudden nervous shudder, and was apparently as timid as a child. He was slightly stooping, and spoke with cautious gestures, his eyes anxiously trying to assess Madeleine's response even before he opened his lips, ever apprehensive of displeasing her, on tenterhooks lest his person, his bearing or his voice should not be to her taste. Constantly unable to trust himself, he was demonstratively both meek and over-fond. But, should he get the impression that she had misunderstood him, a swift surge of pride would draw him up very stiffly. All his strength was in this pride of his. Had he not had in him this native pride, a sensitive responsiveness which hardened him against anything which offended his sense of delicacy, he might have been capable of great baseness. He was one of those super-sensitive creatures who very easily take things to heart and have a constant burning need for affection and peace, ever ready to sink back into a state of living bliss. With their feminine sensibilities, such characters easily forget the world and take refuge deep in their own hearts, seeking to rely on their nobility if ever the world involves them in all its shame and misfortune. While Guillaume would lose himself in Madeleine's smiles, and found it the acme of delight to gaze on her pearly skin, there were also other moments when, unknown to himself, his lips assumed a scornful twist merely because she had just given him one of her frigid, almost mocking glances.

Rounding the big bend which the Champs-Girard lane makes, the young couple found themselves following another stretch which runs between two terribly monotonous grey walls, and they increased their pace to get out of that narrow corridor. After that, they pursued their way across country, by rarely-used paths. Skirting under the hill where those enormous castanea Robinsonia chestnuts rear their domes, they reached Aulnay. Hurrying like that had warmed them up. In the balmy sunshine, the breeze gently buffeting with its warm, acrid breath, their hearts relaxed, and gradually the state almost of tacit hostility in which they had left the train had given place to the camaraderie of old friends. As the countryside gradually permeated them with such well-being that they no longer felt on their guard, let alone on the defensive one against another, that stiffness which was natural to them was forgotten.

Reaching Aulnay, they halted for a moment in the shade of the lofty trees which at this point maintain everlasting freshness. They had felt hot in the sun, so now it was sweet to feel the delicious chill of the foliage wrap round their shoulders.

When they had got back their breath, Guillaume suddenly cried: "I'm damned if I know where we are! What I'm beginning to wonder is whether we're ever going to find anything to eat anywhere about here!"

"Certainly we are, don't you worry," laughed Madeleine. "Before the half-hour is out, we shall be at table. Let me show you the way!"

Quickly she guided him towards the fence-bordered road which led towards the level country. Reaching it, she slipped free from his arm and suddenly scampered ahead, for all the world like a puppy in a sudden fit of delight. All her childlike nature bubbled up in her, in that fresh shade and the quivering silence of the trees she was glad she was a little girl again. Her whole countenance was lighted by smiles which suffused her grey eyes with a brilliant glow. The childlike charm of cheeks and lips now softened those hard forehead lines.

She bounded ahead, then came racing back, shrieking with delight, clutching her skirts in one hand, with a great rustle of petticoats and scattering a faint odour of violets. Guillaume fastened worshipping eyes on her. That aloof, haughty creature was at once forgotten, once more he felt at his ease, utterly in the hands of this great child racing ahead again, calling on him to follow, then just

as suddenly switching round and running back to him to clasp her hands over his shoulder and hang so affectionately there.

At one place the road cut through a sandy knoll, and the surface was deep in loose dust into which their feet sank. Here it was Madeleine's delight to find the softest spots. With her laced boots plunging deep in, she uttered piercing little squeals, and when at last she could not take another big stride, she dissolved into helpless laughter. She might have been a child of twelve.

After that, the road climbed, with sharp corners, threading its way between wooded hillocks. This little ravine seemed wild and desolate, after the fresh shady road through Aulnay. They came upon outcrops of rock. The grass on the slopes was sun-scorched and the hollows cross-laced with brambles. Without a word, Madeleine now took Guillaume's arm. She was tired. Besides, this rocky, desolate road, from which not a roof was to be seen as they wound their way in and out through an eerie ravine, filled her with vague uneasiness.

Still a-quiver from her gambolling and her laughter, she now placed herself entirely in his hands. Guillaume felt her arm press warm and close to his, and in that instant he realized that this woman was indeed his, that beneath the rather alarming dominance of her mind she had a frail heart which craved affection. When she looked up at him, it was with languishing submission and melting smiles. She was at once utterly yielding and wheedling, as if, a shameless orphan of affection, she was all at once soliciting his love. Fatigue, the richness of the trees' shade, the throw-back to childhood, all coupled with the desolateness of this countryside to awaken in her that mood of love, that state of oblivion of the normal senses, which can bring the proudest woman like wax into a man's arms.

With slow steps, Guillaume and Madeleine continued up the slope. From time to time her foot slipped on a pebble, and not to fall she would swiftly clutch her companion's shoulder, each occasion a caress, of that neither had any doubts. Not another word did they utter, the smiles they exchanged sufficed. They and they alone were sufficient language to express the one feeling which filled both their hearts. Under her sunshade, Madeleine's face was adorable. There was a delicate pallor in it, with shadows of silvery grey, while about her mouth played gleams of pink and at the corners of her lips Guillaume saw a delicate network of bluish veins so fine that he was seized with intense desire to plant a kiss there. But he was shy, and to the very top of the rise he wavered. Here, with all the plain

suddenly spread out before them, the young people had the impression that they were no longer concealed. Though the countryside was deserted, they took fright at so vast an expanse of country and drew apart, suddenly uneasy, their embarrassment renewing.

The road followed the edge of this high ground. On the left were plots of raspberries, then huge, monochrome fields of wheat, as far as the eye could reach, here and there a tree thrusting out of them. In the far distance, Verrière Woods formed a black band, as if the sky were in mourning. To the right the country fell away in a series of combes, beyond which the view extended for miles, first overpowering masses of foliage, large black and brown patches, after which, colours and outlines becoming imprecise, the landscape dissolved away in a bluish haze terminated by low hills, the pale violet of which blended with the delicate yellow of the sky. It made one farflung whole, a veritable ocean of hills and dales here and there pinned down by the rare white point of a house or a patch of poplars sombre against the distant sky.

Before this vastness, Madeleine halted suddenly, grave, lost in thought. The breeze lapped her with hot gusts of breath. They could see a storm slowly coming up at the far end of the valley. The sun had just sunk behind dense haze and from every point of the horizon ponderous clouds of coppery grey were gathering. Madeleine's features had reassumed their other expression, of silent hardness. As she stared at the scene before her, with a sort of wondering expectancy as if she had known it all before, she seemed to have forgotten all about her companion. And as her eyes shifted to the menacing storm clouds, she seemed to sink into memories that hurt.

Standing a few paces from her, Guillaume peered at her, uneasily. He felt a gulf suddenly widening between them. Whatever could she be thinking of so intently? It hurt him not to be this girl's everything. With secret apprehension, he now reminded himself that she had already lived through twenty long years without him, and those twenty years seemed to him ominous and black.

But of course she did know this countryside. She must have been here before, perhaps with a lover. He was dying with desire to interrogate her, yet was afraid to do so openly, lest her answer be too frank and wound his love. Nevertheless, he could not refrain from one hesitant question: "I expect you've been in these parts before, Madeleine, haven't you?" he said.

"Oh yes," she replied, quickly, "many times. . . . Come, we must hurry, it's going to pour."

They continued on their way, now walking a little apart, both lost in their own inner thoughts, and in this way they regained the circular road. Here, on the edge of the woods, was an inn and restaurant to which Madeleine led her companion. It was an ugly, squat building, the stuccoed walls cracked and blackened by rain. At the back, on the wood side, there was a sort of garden enclosed by a hedge, and in this were some scraggy trees. Along one side of the hedge was a series of rustic trellis nooks overgrown with hops. These were the "private rooms" of this suburban trippers' restaurant. Each was complete with rough-hewn tables and benches, set on posts sunk in the ground. The boards were stained with red circles where wine had spilled.

When she saw Madeleine, the landlady, a coarse, beefy woman, uttered a cry of surprise.

"Well I never!" she cried. "I thought you were dead and buried. Why, it's more than three months since we saw you. . . . Keepin' well?"

When she saw Guillaume, she stifled some other question which had clearly been on the tip of her tongue. Indeed, she seemed a trifle disconcerted by Guillaume's presence, as somebody she did not know. Guillaume noticed her astonishment and told himself that she must have been expecting to see somebody else in his place.

"Right you be, then," the woman said, though in a slightly less familiar tone. "You would like dinner, you say? Certainly. We'll lay you a table out here, shall we?" She indicated one of the rustic nooks.

Madeleine accepted the innkeeper's demonstration of old acquaintanceship quite unconcernedly. Loosening her scarf, she took off her hat and went to put her things in a room on the ground floor which seemed to serve as bedroom to any Paris folk who happened to be caught here for the night. She apparently knew her way about.

Guillaume however had gone into the yard, where he paced up and down, ill at ease, at a loss to know what to do with his hands. Though the scullery-maid and even the dog had fawned round Madeleine, nobody had taken the slightest notice of him.

When Madeleine returned, she had found her smile again. She paused an instant in the doorway. Her hair, uncovered and loosened, caught a last ray of sunlight with a dazzling glint which lent her

skin the whiteness of marble. She had taken off her wrap altogether, revealing her shoulders and throat in all their rich fulness and subtlety of line. The young man's eyes fastened with uneasy wonder on her, she was so lovely and vibrant with life, but he could not get rid of the thought that some other man had also seen her just like that, smiling in the back doorway of this inn, and the mere notion was so upsetting that he felt a violent need to take her in his arms at once and press her to him, so she should for ever forget this place, with its courtyard and its private nooks, and have no thought but for him.

"Quick, let's have dinner at once!" she cried, all cheerfulness. "Hallo there, Marie! Pick us a really big bowl of raspberries, will you? Oh, what an appetite I've got!"

She had forgotten all about Guillaume. She hurried down the row of screened-off tables, looking for the one laid for them.

"Oh no, I should think not! I'm not going to sit on that seat," she cried. "I remember only too well, it's all nails, they tore my frock. . . . Lay for us here, Marie!"

She sat down at a clean table on which the maid had not yet had time to put a single plate. Only then, suddenly remembering Guillaume, she turned, to see him standing some paces away.

"What's the matter?" she called over to him. "Don't you mean to have dinner with me? . . . Standing there like a lamp-post!"

She broke into laughter. The coming storm seemed to charge her with rather hysterical gaiety. Her gestures became spasmodic, her talk flitted quickly from one subject to another. Guillaume was just the opposite. Storms depressed him. He slumped in his place, and was unable to do more than reply in monosyllables. Their dinner lasted more than an hour. They had the garden all to themselves. During the week, suburban restaurants like this were empty.

Madeleine did all the talking. She babbled on, all about her childhood, the years she had spent in a boarding-school, with a thousand details telling him all the silly things about the mistresses and the tricks the children got up to. On this subject she was inexhaustible, never failing to dig out yet another good story which made her laugh in advance, and all this she related with childhood's gestures and even with the piping voice of a little girl. More than once Guillaume made an attempt to get her to talk about her less distant past. Like the injured, who, unable to forget their hurt, are constantly tempted to feel their wounds, he would have had her talk about her quite recent life, when she was a grown girl and a

young woman. He tried to think out ways of leading her on to tell him the circumstances of that occasion when, dining in one of these fenced-off booths, she had torn her frock. But Madeleine every time eluded these probings, to dive back with a sort of stubborn intent into the innocent tales of her schooldays. This seemed to calm her, easing her nerves, making it easier for her to accept the fact that she was dining alone with a young man whom she had only known for a week. Whenever Guillaume fixed on her eyes in which glinted a flicker of desire, or slid his hand forward to brush it against hers, she took a peculiar pleasure in not reacting at all, plunging at once into a new story which began: "I was five at the time . . ."

Just as they were finishing dinner, and had reached their dessert, large drops of rain splashed down on the table and, rumbling threateningly, like an army on the march towards them, distant thunder drew nearer. A brilliant flash of lightning suddenly swept its violet light across the white cloth.

"And here is the storm," cried Madeleine. "Oh, how I love the lightning!"

She left the table and went into the middle of the yard, to get a better view. Guillaume stayed in the booth all by himself. He felt ill. Storms always made him feel curiously ill at ease. Not that he was at all afraid. He was not worried about being struck by lightning. It was merely that his flesh rebelled against the mere sound of thunder and still more did he detest those blinding flashes of lightning. When a flash dazzled him, he felt as if somebody had struck him a violent blow. It was a stomach disorder which made him shiver distressingly, but, though no more than a trick of the nervous system, it had all the appearance of fear, of cowardice, and it made him miserable to seem such a timid creature to Madeleine. He clapped his hand over his eyes, then, no longer able to struggle against the rebellion of every nerve in his body, he called to her and asked whether it would not be wiser of them to finish their dessert somewhere inside.

"But it's not really raining," she replied. "We could very well stay out here."

"I would rather go in," he said, hesitantly. "The sight of lightning makes me feel sick."

She stared at him in utter astonishment.

"Oh!" she cried. "Then let us go in."

A maid carried the remains of their meal into the common restaurant. This was a large room with blackened walls. It was sparsely furnished with tables and benches. Guillaume sat in a chair

with his back to the windows. Before him was a plateful of raspberries, but he did not touch one. Madeleine gobbled hers down, then went to open the window into the courtyard. Leaning her elbows on the sill, she gazed out at the inflamed sky.

The storm now broke with incredible violence, right over the woods. The air became oppressive with the smouldering weight of the clouds. Then the rain stopped again. Brusque gusts of wind rustled through the trees. Flashes of lightning followed one another so rapidly that outside it was like day, but a bluish daylight which lent the countryside the appearance of a romantic stage set. The thunder-claps did not roll echoing away down the valley, but broke off sharply, as dry and brittle as the detonations of gunfire. Trees all round the inn must have been struck. After each clap of thunder there came a terrifying silence.

At the thought of this window open at his back, Guillaume experienced painful anxiety. In spite of himself, with a sort of nervous reflex, he turned his head, to see the white figure of Madeleine outlined against the violet illumination of the lightning flashes. Her auburn hair, damped by the first drops of rain before they came in, lay loose over her shoulders, and it glowed brightly at each sudden flash.

"Oh, isn't it lovely!" she cried. "Guillaume, do come and look. There is a tree over there which looks as if it had caught fire. The lightning flashes skip among the trees like animals run wild. . . . And the sky! . . . It really is a wonderful firework display!"

But Guillaume could no longer resist the crazy desire he felt to go and close the shutters.

"Look here," he said, getting to his feet, "do shut that window. What you are doing is dangerous."

"Don't tell me you're really afraid," she replied with a throaty laugh, one of those mocking laughs of a woman who despises. Guillaume lowered his eyes. For a moment he wavered, before, with an agonized mumble, he begged her again to shut the window and resumed his place.

In the same moment the clouds broke and a deluge began, together with it a gale of wind, driving a flood of rain into the restaurant, and this finally decided Madeleine to close the window. She rejoined Guillaume.

After a silence, she said: "When I was tiny, when there was a storm my father used to take me in his arms and carry me to the window. I remember that at first I used to hide my face against his

shoulder, then I began to like watching the lightning. . . . Do you mean to say you are afraid of it?"

He raised his head. "No, not afraid," he replied, gently. "It merely makes me feel ill."

The silence between them renewed, while with frightful thunderclaps the storm continued. This went on for three hours. All this time, Guillaume remained seated there, slumped against the table, lifeless, his features pale and drawn. Seeing the spasmodic shudders which shook him from time to time, Madeleine at last grasped that he really did feel ill. She then began to regard him with a mixture of curiosity and astonishment, astonished to find that a man could be more sensitive than a woman.

These three hours were terribly long for both of them. They scarcely exchanged a word all the time. Their sweethearts' dinner had indeed ended strangely. But at last the thunder moved away, the rain slackened, and Madeleine went to the window to open it.

"It's all over," she said. "Come, Guillaume, there is no more lightning."

Relieved, breathing freely at last, the young man propped his elbows on the window-sill beside her, and they looked out for a moment together. Then, stretching her hand outside, she said: "It's hardly raining at all now. We had better be going, unless we want to miss the last train."

At this moment, the landlady entered the room.

"You'll spend the night here, I expect, won't you?" she said. "I'll get your room ready."

"No, no," cried Madeleine quickly. "We are not staying, I don't want to. We only come out for dinner. Didn't we, Guillaume? In fact, we were on the point of going."

"But it's out of the question," said the woman. "The roads are impassable just now. You'll never get through to the station."

The young woman seemed very upset by this. Protesting, she insisted: "Oh, but I simply must go. We ought not to stay here."

"As you please," said the landlady. "Only I'm telling you, if you do venture out, you'll sleep under the stars tonight, that's all."

Guillaume had said nothing. He merely fastened supplicating eyes on Madeleine. She tried to avoid his glance, walking up and down uneasily, the victim of some inner struggle. But at last, despite her determination not to look him in the face, she did glance at him, to find him so subdued, so unresisting regarding her, that her will weakened. An exchange of glances followed which conquered her.

She took a few more paces about the room, her forehead all hard lines, her countenance icy, then turned to the landlady of the inn.

"Right you are," she said. "We will stay overnight."

"Then I'll go and get you the blue room ready."

Madeleine started violently.

"No, not that one, any other," she said, in a strange voice.

"But all the other rooms are taken."

There came another spell of wavering, a new battle fought in Madeleine's heart. "We really would do better to try to get back," she mumbled. But for the second time meeting Guillaume's wheedling eyes, she gave way.

While the bed was being made up, they went outside. In a meadow which bordered the wood they found a fallen tree-trunk and sat down there. In the far distance, the countryside was breathing deep in the freshness after the rain. Chill gusts of wind broke in through the lingering warmth, with its acrid scents of greenery and wet soil. From the wood came strange sounds, the dripping of all the leaves, the greensward drawing in the moisture which had fallen; a universal shudder, the voluptuous shudder of the arable lands whose dust has been laid. Running through the darkness of the night, that shudder assumed the mysterious, penetrating charm of the darkness.

Half the sky, exquisitely serene, was covered with stars, the other half was still veiled by a dark curtain of clouds which were slowly recoiling. Seated on their fallen tree-trunk, the two young people could not distinguish each other's faces. In the dense shadow cast by a clump of tall trees, they were aware only of their vague outlines. For some minutes, they said not a word, merely listened to their thoughts. It remained but for those thoughts to be repeated aloud.

"You do not love me, Madeleine," Guillaume murmured at last.

"You are mistaken, my dear," the young woman replied slowly. "I think I do love you. Only I have not had the time to probe into myself and give my own question a proper answer . . . I would have liked to have had more time."

They were both silent again. The young man's pride was hurt. He would have liked his beloved to fall into his arms at once, of her own volition, not be thrust there by a mere twist of fortune.

"What I find unbearable," he whispered, "is to owe you to chance . . . You would never have stayed here with me tonight, if the road had not been flooded."

"Ah, that shows you don't know me," cried Madeleine. "If I stay, it is because that is my wish. I would have gone through the storm at its very height rather than stay with you against my will."

She fell into a revery, then, vaguely, as if speaking to herself: "I do not know what will happen to me later," she said. "I think I have the will-power to manage my life, but it is not easy."

She stopped short. She had been on the point of confessing to Guillaume that it had in fact been a strange sense of being sorry for him that had now decided her to stay. Women yield their love more often than people think from charity, from a need to be kind. During the storm she had seen this young man in such a state of nerves and he had then eyed her with such melting eyes that she had not felt strong enough to refuse him. Guillaume, however, did understand that she was giving him herself by a sort of charity, and thereby all his touchiness was pricked into life. Love given in this way touched his pride on a raw place.

"You are right," he said, "we should give ourselves more time. Shall we start out now? Now it is I who would rather go back to Paris."

There was a fevered note in his voice. Madeleine at once noticed the change in him.

"But, my dear, whatever is the matter?" she demanded, in astonishment.

"Let's go," he repeated, "let's go. Please."

"Why change your mind now?" she said. "Sooner or later we should have come to it. . . . From the very first day I met you, I have been well aware that I am yours. . . . When I met you, I had been dreaming of retiring into a nunnery, I had promised myself I would not make a second mistake. So long as I had only had one lover, I kept my pride. Today, I am aware that I have already begun to slip to a life of shame. . . . Don't be angry if I speak frankly."

She had said all this with such melancholy that the young man's defences of pride weakened. He became gentle and affectionate again.

"You don't know me," he said. "Trust in me. I am not like other men. I shall love you as my wife, I shall make you happy, I swear I will."

Madeleine did not reply. She thought she knew what life was, and was telling herself that in the end Guillaume too would leave her, and shame would be her lot. She was strong, and knew she

could resist. But, despite the logic of what she said, she felt no desire to resist. She was astonished herself to accept what, only the day before, she would have rejected with cold firmness.

Guillaume meditated. For the first time, this young woman had mentioned her past to him, admitted that she had already had a lover, and now, the moment his shadow had been evoked, this lover, whose ineffaceable living memory he found in every gesture, every word of the girl's, seemed to rise between them.

For a long time, neither said a word. They had made up their minds to come together, and now awaited the hour of bedtime with strange mistrust. They felt onerous, disturbing thoughts oppressing them both. Not one word of love, of tenderness came to their tongues. If they had spoken, it would have been to tell of their deep discomfiture. Guillaume held Madeleine's hand in his, but that hand remained ice-cold, lifeless.

Never would he have believed that his first love exchange would be so burdened with anxiety. Night enveloped them in its shadows and its mystery. They were alone, cut off from the world, lost in the acrid enchantment of a night of storm, and deep in their hearts the only pulse that beat was that of fear, and the uncertainty of the morrow.

Meanwhile, all about them, rain-soaked, the countryside softly sank to its slumbers, stirring with a last quiver of voluptuous delight. The freshness began to strike through their clothing. The acrid scent of the soil and the wet foliage seeped down more heavily now, drowsy with intoxication, like the winy odour which emerges from the vintner's vat. There was only a shred of cloud left in the sky. The dark blue canopy of heaven was alive with the pullulation of its stars.

Suddenly, Madeleine shuddered. "I'm cold," she cried. "Let's go in."

Without a word they entered the inn. The landlady showed them up to their room, planting a candlestick on the corner of the table, to light the walls with its vacillating glimmer. It was a small room, done out in vulgar paper with large bluish flowers, which the damp had stained with large dirty patches. A large deal bedstead, painted dark red, nearly filled the room. From the ceiling fell an icy chill. The corners of the room smelt musty.

They both gave a shiver as they entered. They felt as if somebody had drawn damp sheets round them. It left them tongue-tied as they made their way to and fro. Guillaume was anxious to close

the shutters and spent some time wrestling with them in vain. Something must be in the way.

"There's a hook at the top," Madeleine called to him, suddenly, in spite of herself.

Involuntarily, Guillaume swung round and looked at her. Both turned very pale. The unintentional admission hurt them both: Madeleine knew that hook, she had slept here before.

The next morning, she was the first to waken. Slipping softly out of bed, she dressed, as she did so keeping her eye on Guillaume, who was still sound asleep. In her eyes there was something akin to anger. An indefinable expression of regret clouded her rigid forehead, and there was not a hint of that softening smile on her lips. At moments her eyes switched from the face of her lover to the walls of the room and certain patches on the ceiling which were familiar to her. Feeling she was alone, she was not afraid to yield to her memories. Once, when her eyes turned again to the pillow which bore Guillaume's head, she started back, as if she half expected to see another head in that place.

When she had finished dressing, she went to the window and, opening it, leant out, the countryside, golden with sunlight, before her. She had been thus dreaming quite half an hour, her temples cooled, and her countenance relaxing at last amid more tranquil thoughts, mingled with distant hopes, when a faint sound made her turn.

The sleeper had roused. His eyes still heavy with sleep, on his lips Guillaume had that hint of a waking smile which is warmly soft with gratitude on the morning after a night of love, and he held out his arms to her as she went across to him.

"Do you love me?" he demanded, softly, and very solemnly.

Now Madeleine too smiled, with that kindly smile she had, the smile of a gentle girl-child, a loving smile. She no longer saw the room. Instead, this affectionate question the young man had put to her filled her with immense bliss. She gave Guillaume his kiss.

CHAPTER TWO

Madeleine Férat was the daughter of a manufacturing engineer. Her father, born in a little village in the Auvergne mountains without a penny to his name, had moved to Paris to make his way. He was one of those squat, square-shouldered Auvergne types, with a power for savage application to his trade. Getting himself apprenticed to a machine-tool maker, he spent nearly ten years forging and filing, never for an instant sparing his massive fists, while, penny by penny, he put by a few thousand francs. From the first blow he had struck with a hammer he had sworn that he would not put his tools down once till he had saved enough to set up on his own.

When he felt he had enough at his back, he hired a barn-like timber erection Montrouge way and set up as a boiler-maker. It was his first step towards material success and the enormous workshops which it was his dream in due course to be the boss of. Now for another ten years he lived in that barn, forging and filing to perfection, without ever any leisure or distraction. Little by little, he extended his operations, till he had a biggish team of men under him. At last he was able to buy a plot of ground and have some enormous workshops erected on the very site where his original shanty had stood. His range of products also grew; from simple boilers he expanded to kitchen ranges. The railway network then being built all over France brought him large orders, and high profits. His dream was coming true: he became a wealthy man.

Hitherto he had worked at the anvil with the notion of earning every penny he could, but he had never once asked himself what he was going to do with the money once he got it. For all his living expenses he needed barely a crown a day. His addiction to work, his ignorance of the pleasures, even the bare amenities of life, made his fortune useless to him. He had got rich rather from sheer stubbornness than to get anything out of it. He had sworn that one day he would be his own big boss, and his whole life had been devoted to realizing that oath. Only when he had gathered nearly a million did he at last ask himself what he was to do with it. Incidentally, he was not at all a miserly character.

First, next door to his factory, he now ran up a little house in typical middle-class style, and this he did out and furnished quite tastefully. But with all the upholstery he put into it, he was like a cat on hot bricks and preferred to spend his time with his men, surrounded by forges and grime. He might even have decided to let the house and resume the lodging he had previously used just over his office, had an event of some seriousness not brought about a profound change in his existence, and given birth to a new man in him.

For all his rough voice and uncouth manners, Férat was as gentle as a child, incapable of hurting a fly. All that native gentleness, however, was asleep in him, suffocated by his life of hard toil, when he met an orphan girl who had not a penny to her name and lived with an old aunt. This girl, Marguerite, was so pale and fragile that one would hardly have thought her over sixteen. Hers was one of those sweet, subdued faces which appeal to strong men. Férat was attracted and moved by the young girl, with her timorous smile and the humility of a devoted maid-servant. He had spent his life amid coarse workers, and the charms of weakness were quite new to him, so he fell in love with Marguerite's delicate hands and childlike countenance. In no time, he had married her, bearing her off in his arms to his new house, like a child.

When he had thus taken possession of her, he loved her with fanatical devotion. She was daughter, sister and wife to him. He worshipped her pallor, her sickly air and every young woman's frailty of hers when she was unwell, and he dared not lay his calloused fists on her. He had never had a love life. When he probed into his memory, the sole sentimental element he could find in his life was the religious affection his mother had once instilled in him for a white Virgin Mary smiling mysteriously beneath her veiling in the obscurity of his little village church. It seemed to him that his Marguerite was an incarnation of that Virgin. She had the same reserved smile, the same sanctified calm, the same tender kindness. From the very outset he made of his wife an idol and a queen. She was the supreme mistress in the home, bringing to it an atmosphere of elegance and well-being, transforming the cold middle-class dwelling which the one-time workman had erected into a closed retreat shut off from the world, a retreat of exquisite redolence and all the warmth of love.

For almost a year, Férat hardly paid any attention to his workshops. He was utterly absorbed in this happiness of his, so exquisite

and new to him, with that frail little woman to care for. What delighted him and at moments moved him almost to tears was the gratitude which Marguerite evinced. Every glance of hers was a declaration of thanks to him for the contentment and well-being that he had given her. In her queenship she remained humble, adoring her husband as her master and as benefactor too, never seeming able to find affectionate gestures enough to thank him for it all. She had married almost without noticing Férat's weather-beaten skin, and without thought of his forty years. It had been an affection more filial than otherwise that prompted her to accept his proposal. She had sensed his kindness. "I love you," she often told her husband, "because you are strong and do not despise my weakness, I love you because I was nothing, yet you made me your wife." And whenever Férat heard words like these whispered with such affectionate humility, he would draw her to his bosom in a transport of ineffable joy.

After a year of marriage, Marguerite became pregnant. It was a painful pregnancy. A few days before the confinement, the doctor took Férat aside and said that he was worried. The young woman seemed to him to be of such delicate constitution that he doubted whether she would stand the strain of her labour. For a week Férat was almost out of his mind. To his wife, reclining on a bed-chair, he would offer a smile, then go out into the street, to sob. He spent the nights in the empty factory, going indoors every hour or so to ask for the news. At moments, when his anxiety threatened to choke him, he took a sledge-hammer and let fly at an anvil, to assuage his fury. At last the awful moment came and the doctor's fears proved only too justified. Marguerite died in childbirth, leaving behind her a daughter.

Férat's grief was terrible. He could not weep. When the poor little corpse had been buried, he locked himself in, and surrendered to a melancholy collapse, broken at times by fits of blind rage. Invariably he spent his nights in the silent darkness of his workshops, prowling about among the mute machinery, the vices and the scrap iron lying everywhere. In time, the sight of all those tools which had made him rich would send him into fits of speechless anger. He had conquered poverty, but against death he had been powerless. For twenty years his powerful hands had made light of heavy iron work, yet they had been utterly incapable of saving this dear creature whom he had so loved. And his cry was that after all he had been a miserable creature, feeble as a mere child. Had he

been strong, Marguerite would never have been snatched from him.

For a whole month, nobody dared intrude on his tribulation, till, one day, little Madeleine's wet-nurse placed the child in his arms. He had forgotten that he had a daughter. It was the sight of this poor little creature that at last brought him to tears. He wept copiously, and this relieved his head and his heart.

He studied his little daughter. "She is fragile and delicate like her mother," he muttered. "She will die as her mother did."

From then on, his sorrow softened. He came to feel that Marguerite was not entirely dead. He had felt a paternal love for his wife and now, loving his own daughter, he could deceive himself and persuade himself that his heart had lost nothing.

The child was indeed very puny. The pallor of the tiny face seemed to be that of the poor woman who had passed away. But to Férat it was a triumph at first not to find his own sturdy, tough constitution reproduced in Madeleine. It enabled him to imagine that she was entirely the child of the woman who had gone. When he dandled her on his knee the crazy idea came to him that his wife had died merely to be re-born in the child, so he might love her with greater tenderness than ever.

Up to the age of two, Madeleine was an ailing baby, and many a time her life seemed to hang by a thread. Born of a dying woman, she had in her eyes a lurking shadow rarely lighted by a smile. In fact, this weakness was her salvation. Childhood complaints just did not take in that poor little body. Doctors declared that she would not live, but yet she did, just as the flickering flame of a holy lamp may constantly seem on the point of going out, yet still maintain its feeble glimmer. But when she was two, health suddenly awakened in her. In a few months the child's big, sombre eyes lighted up, and blood circulated to lips and cheeks. It was a veritable rising from the dead.

Till then, she had been just like a little corpse, white and silent, never laughing or playing. But as soon as her legs gained strength and she could stand, she filled the house with her chatter and her busy toddling. Her father would hold out his arms and call her to him and she would rush to their refuge with those uncertain steps that are one of the great charms of infancy. For hours on end, Férat played with his daughter. He used to take her down to the workshops, amid all the frightful din of the tools. He used to say that he wanted her to have the pluck of a boy. And to make her

laugh he got up to childish tricks which no mother could have invented.

One strange feature augmented this good man's love for his daughter. As Madeleine grew up, she became more and more like him. In those far-off days when she lay shuddering with a temperature in her cradle, she had had the gentle, sad features of her mother. Now, quivering with life, a sturdy, energetic child, she seemed a regular tomboy, with Férat's grey eyes and prominent forehead. Like him, too, she was stubborn and hot-tempered. Nevertheless, the crisis of her birth had still left her with a sort of nervous tic, an inward weakness which would cause her to break down at the height of one of her childhood fits of rage, and then she would collapse into terrible sobbing. Whereas the upper portion of her face had assumed the hard mask of the former workman, she was still like her mother in the softness of her mouth and the affectionate submissiveness of her smile.

She grew up, and Férat dreamed of a prince for her. He had gone back to managing his factory, for now he knew just what he would do with his millions. It was his idea to heap that wealth at the feet of his beloved little idol. He was now no longer content with a steady profit, but launched forth into speculative lines, risking everything to double his capital quickly. Then a sudden slump in all ironwork ruined him.

At the time, Madeleine was six. Férat displayed incredible drive. The blow which had struck him scarcely made him falter. With the quick clear-sightedness of a man of action, he reminded himself that his daughter was still only a child and he had still time to earn her a dowry. But he was unable to make that titanic effort again in France. He needed a get-rich-quick country as field of operations. It took him only a few hours to come to a decision. He would go to America. Madeleine would wait for him in a Paris boarding-school.

He fought penny by penny for the remnant of his fortune and succeeded in salvaging enough to endow Madeleine with two thousand francs a year, his thought being that if he did fare badly, at least she would always have enough to keep herself. He set out himself with only a hundred francs in his pocket. The eve of his departure he took Madeleine to a fellow Auvergnian, whom he charged to look after her. This was a man named Lobrichon, who had come to Paris at about the same time that Férat did, beginning as haberdasher, then going into the linen trade, in which he had

made a nice little fortune. Férat had complete confidence in this old friend.

Telling Madeleine that he would be back the same evening, he accepted the embrace of her little arms on the point of breaking down, and left the room staggering like a man intoxicated. Then in the next room he embraced Lobrichon.

"If I go under out there," he said, "you must be father to her."

Férat never even reached America. The ship by which he travelled was caught in a storm off the coast of France and wrecked. It was not till long afterwards that Madeleine learned of her father's death.

The day after Férat left, Lobrichon took the child to the des Ternes boarding-school, indicated to him by an elderly lady of his acquaintance as an excellent one. The two thousand francs income would amply suffice for the fees, and the former haberdasher was nothing loth to get rid without delay of this lively little girl whose noisy play disturbed his selfish, self-made-man's peace.

The school stood in the heart of large gardens and was a comfortable enough place. The ladies who kept it restricted the numbers, putting the fees high so as to limit themselves to rich parents' children. They taught their pupils all the finishing school tricks, making up for catechism and spelling with curtseys and débutante smiles. When a young lady quit their care, she was as a rule utterly ignorant, but well equipped in any drawing-room to display all the pert graces and babble and make eyes like the smartest of Parisian maids. The good ladies knew their trade and had known how to acquire a reputation of tip-top smartness for their establishment. It was an honour for any family to hand a daughter over to them, with their guarantees of turning out a wonderfully lovable doll.

In this atmosphere, Madeleine was always ill at ease. She lacked finesse, she was noisy and plain-spoken. At play-time she tended to romp like a boy, with a boisterous delight which disturbed the elegant cloister. Had her father brought her up at his side, she would have become brave, frank, upright, and proud-hearted.

It was her little companions who taught her the ways of femininity. At the outset, her gestures, her shouting, all displeased those little dolls of ten years of age who were already highly skilled at never creasing their skirts. The pupils of this school played very little. Instead, they strolled, like grown-ups, about the gardens, and there were little minxes no higher than your hand who already knew how to wave a dignified salutation to one another with the tips of their

gloved fingers. From these delicious dolls Madeleine learned many a thing of which she had before been utterly ignorant. In corners, behind shrubs, she would come on little groups talking about men. She joined in these discussions with all the burning curiosity of the woman awakening in the child, and so acquired a precocious education in the ways of smart society. The worst of it was that though these little hussies thought they knew everything, it was all dream-chatter. They talked about wanting lovers and whispered to each other about their love for this or that young man whom they had seen on their last walk out. They read each other the long love letters which they scrawled during English lessons, and never hid their hope that any night they might be abducted. Such discourse was quite harmless for little creatures who were truly very cunning and spry, but they had a permanent influence on Madeleine.

Férat had bequeathed to his daughter a clear mind, and his working-class logical power of quick decision. As soon as she thought she knew about life, the child tried to build up a precise picture of the world, of course according to what she saw and heard in that boarding-school of hers. From her companions' childish babble, she drew the conclusion that loving a man was not wrong and you could love the first comer. The girls rarely spoke of marriage. Madeleine, being by nature given to simple ideas, got the notion that one picked up one's lover in the street and, taking his arm, calmly walked off with him.

Not that all this really disturbed her at all. She was indeed rather cold by temperament. She talked love with her little friends just as she talked frocks with them. It was merely that she said to herself: "If I ever fall in love with a man, I shall do what Blanche does, I shall write him long letters and try to make him elope with me." In all such dreams there was an element of conflict which delighted her. This indeed was all the pleasure that she expected to get out of it. Later, when she really knew the shameful features of life, she smiled sadly when she recalled what she had thought as a schoolgirl. Nevertheless, even if she did not know it, deep in her heart she still had the idea that it was logical and honest, when one loved a man, to tell him so and go off with him.

A girl with a character like that would have been capable of being very strong-willed, but unfortunately, nothing developed either her frankness or her strength of character. She merely wanted to pursue some simple path in life, and was rather indifferent what it was, so long as it seemed both powerful and undisturbed. All

she needed to cure her of that lovesick servant-girl impressionability which her mother had bequeathed her was to have been taught how to be on her guard against those moments of weakness, but what on the contrary she was given was an upbringing which increased all that impressionability. From a tomboyish little thing they merely tried to make a hypocritical young girl. If this did not succeed, that was because her innate character rejected the idea of accustoming herself to those condescending little nods, those languishing inclinations of the head, those falsehoods of countenance and heart. Thus she grew up amid all those young minxes, in an atmosphere full of the enervating scents of milady's dressing-room. The honeyed speech of the mistresses, who were instructed to wait on their pupils, like so many chambermaids to a flock of heiresses, did have the effect of softening her character. Every day she heard all round her: "Don't worry your head, don't let yourself seem cold, learn to be yielding, that's what you are here to learn." Thus she learned to forget some of the things she had formerly thought important, but without building any firm line of conduct from all the false society tricks they gave her, so that in the end she became rather a lesser person than she had been, a young girl devoid of any sense of direction. Even the notion that a woman might have duties almost passed her by altogether. In its stead, however, she did develop a great passion for independence and going her own way. Though with strange weaknesses, she was going to march straight on life's way, like a man. Yet she never became a liar, and still had enough character to take it out on herself if she were ever to do anything base.

The secluded life she led all went to build up in her a very false notion of the world. Lobrichon, now her guardian, very rarely came to see her, and never did more than give her a little pat on the cheek and say "Be a good girl!" A mother could have enlightened her regarding the misconceptions with which her mind was full. So she grew up, one by herself, absorbed in her own sense of what was right and inclined to be mistrustful of any outside advice. The most ridiculous little misdeeds of childhood were serious things for her, since she accepted them as the sole rule of conduct. Her school companions used often to go home for the day on Sundays, every time picking up a new triviality of adult life. All this time, Madeleine stayed at her school, getting more and more convinced that her erroneous ideas were the right ones. She even came to spending her holidays shut away with her own thoughts. Lobrichon had been

afraid of her tomboyishness, and always kept her at a distance. Thus nine years passed, till Madeleine was fifteen, already a young woman, fated for ever to bear the ineffaceable mark of that dream-world in which she had been brought up.

She had been taught dancing and music. She could paint a charming water-colour and do all sorts of embroidery. But she had not a clue how to hemstitch a sheet or make her own bed. As for book-learning, this stopped at a smattering of grammar, a little arithmetic, and a lot of Bible stories. She had been taught to pay great attention to her handwriting, but, to the despair of her teachers, this had remained crabbed and clumsy. This was the sum total of her knowledge. It was held against her that she bowed too stiffly and ruined her smile by the cold expression of her grey eyes.

When she was fifteen, Lobrichon, who had latterly taken to visiting her frequently, asked her if she would like to leave school. She was in no hurry to plunge into the unknown, but as she had grown up she had come to detest the false, honeyed voices of her mistresses and the artificial charm of her companions. So she said she was ready to go to live with him. The next day, she slept in the little house which her father's friend had bought out at Passy.

The one-time ready-made coat dealer now had his plan. He had retired from business when he was sixty. For more than thirty years, he had lived a niggardly life, eating poorly, doing without any feminine company, all merely to build up his fortune. Like Férat, he had been a great worker, but he had worked for his future enjoyment. It was his idea, now he was rich, to satisfy his lusts lavishly. Having made his pile, he bought this little detached house, snug with courtyard on the street side and garden behind, and took on a good cook-housekeeper, resolved to take his old friend's daughter for wife.

Madeleine had not got a penny, but she was a well-built, strong girl, and already had that breadth of bosom which corresponded to Lobrichon's ideal. Here it should be added that Lobrichon only decided on this step after a lot of calculation. The girl, however, was still young, and he told himself that he would be able to educate her to his needs, letting her take her time maturing under his eyes, while he, so to speak, got an advance taste of future enjoyments from the mere spectacle of her unfolding beauty. This would mean that he would then acquire her as wife in full virginity, and shape her to his particular tastes like any harem slave. To this notion of shaping a young girl for his wife he brought the outrageous

concentration of thought of one who had deprived his own flesh for long years.

So Madeleine now lived in this little house at Passy, and four years had passed happily, in which, however, she had really only changed her prison, though so far she had no complaint about her guardian's persistent concern with her. She felt no desire to go out and instead spent whole days at her embroidery, without ever a hint of those fits of moodiness which overcome so many adolescent girls.

The fact was, she was a slow developer. Besides, Lobrichon was full of little kindnesses regarding his dear child. He would often take her delicate hands in his and imprint his hot lips on her forehead, caresses which she accepted with a tranquil smile, quite blind to the strange look in the old man's eyes whenever, treating him as a father, she unknotted the lace collar from her neck in his presence.

She had just passed her nineteenth birthday when, one evening, the old haberdasher so far forgot himself as suddenly to implant his kiss full on her lips. With an instinctive gesture of revolt, she at once pushed him away, then faced him boldly, though without quite understanding what it was all about. Immediately the old man dropped to his knees, muttering the most outrageous things. The wretched dotard, racked for such long months by hot desires, had been incapable of playing his rôle of disinterested protector right through to the end. It is however quite on the cards that Madeleine would have married him, had he not tried to force the pace like that. Coldly informing him that she would leave his house the following day, she withdrew from him very quietly.

Once he was alone, Lobrichon realized what an irreparable mistake he had committed. He knew Madeleine and had no doubt she would do as she said. He then lost his head and descended to trying at least to satisfy his lust. He told himself that extreme force would perhaps break the girl's will and throw her conquered into his arms. Towards midnight he went up to his ward's room. He had a key of the room and often in the past, on hot nights, had crept into it to look at the girl as she lay, half naked, in all the disarray of sleep.

Madeleine was suddenly wakened by a strange sensation of fever. As she had not put out the night-light, she saw Lobrichon, who had slipped beside her and was about to press her to him. With unexpected strength, she took him by the throat with both her hands,

slipped her feet to the floor, and held the wretched old man, now choking, down on the bed. The sight of this poor old wretch, pale and bleary-looking, in only his shirt, and the fact that his naked limbs had just touched hers, filled her with horrible loathing. She felt herself robbed of her virginity. For a while she held him there, staring at him with her grey eyes, asking herself whether she should strangle him. Then she thrust him from her with such violence that his head banged against the alcove wall and he fell back unconscious.

She dressed quickly and left the house. She directed her steps to the Seine. As she followed along the embankment, the clocks struck one. She kept straight on, telling herself that she would go on walking like that till morning, then find a lodging for herself. Her rage had left her, all she felt now was a tremendous sadness. She had but one thought: physical love was shameful, and she would never love anyone. She could not get out of her eyes the sight of the old man's thin white shanks sticking up out of his night-shirt.

As she came to the New Bridge, she turned down Dauphine Street, to avoid a band of students who were staggering from side to side of the embankment. On she plunged, wherever her nose led her. A few moments later, she noticed that a man was following her. She tried to get away, but he ran after her and caught her up. Then, with the resolution and frankness which characterized her, she turned to the stranger and told him briefly what had just happened. The young man gallantly offered her his arm and said she had better let him offer her a bed for the night. This unknown young man was tall and young, with a cheerful, pleasing countenance. Madeleine looked him squarely in the face for a few moments, then quite calmly and confidently took his arm.

It turned out that he had a single room in a Soufflot Street hotel. He told her she was to take the bed, he would manage quite well on the couch. She turned things over quickly in her mind, examining the room, with its foils and clay pipes, and also looking up and down at this protector, who had addressed her with such a cordial, friendly familiarity. Then on the table she noticed a pair of women's gloves. But the young man put her mind at rest and said she need not worry, no woman would be coming in to disturb them. Besides, he said, had he been married, he would never have run after her in the street. Madeleine blushed.

The following morning, she awakened from sleep in that young man's arms. Moreover, she had put herself there, on a sudden wild

impulse which she could not understand. What she had refused Lobrichon with fiercest disgust she had thus only an hour or two later granted a stranger. And felt no regrets, either, merely some astonishment.

When her lover learned that the story she had told the evening before was not a yarn, he seemed very astonished. For he had thought he had come upon a smart girl who spun such a tale just to make herself more desirable. He had thought that the little scene played through before they went to bed all specially prepared. Otherwise, he would never have acted so unconcernedly and would certainly have given quite a lot of thought to the serious consequences of such an affair. He was a very decent fellow, ready to have his bit of fun, but with a healthy awe of serious love affairs. All he had thought he was going to do was put up Madeleine for the night and see the back of her on the morrow. He was much put out to find how mistaken he had been.

"My poor child," he said to her in agitated tones, "you and I have made a terrible mistake, you know. Just forgive me and forget. . . . I am due to leave France in a few weeks and don't even know if I shall ever come back."

Madeleine received this intimation quite calmly. After all she did not love this young man. To him their sleeping together was just a chance affair, to her it was an accident in which her inexperience failed to see anything more than a passing act. The thought that this lover was due to go away very soon could not break her heart so soon. At the same time, the notion of parting from him at once did upset her in the strangest way. In a vague way, she told herself that this was now her husband and she could not leave him just like that. For a few moments she went to and fro in the room, lost in thought, gathering together her garments. Then she came back, to sit on the edge of the bed and, rather uncertainly, say: "I will tell you what, you put me up till you leave Paris. . . . That will be more convenient all round."

The idea that it would be more convenient, expressed with such utter innocence, touched the young man on the raw. He realized in a flash all the everlasting misfortune he had brought into the life of this grown-up child, who had thus yielded to him with all the innocence of an infant. He drew her to his bosom and told her the room was hers.

During the morning, Madeleine went to Passy for her things. There, she had an interview with her guardian, and forced her will

on him. Fearing the scandal, the old man, still badly shaken by the midnight scuffle, was like a jelly. She made him promise never to try to see her again. She took with her the papers relating to her annuity. That money was her great pride. She could stay with her lover without having to sell herself.

The same evening, she was peacefully at her embroidery again, now in her room in Soufflot Street, finishing off the work she had started in her guardian's house. Her life did not seem to her to be too badly upset. She did not feel she had anything to be ashamed of. None of her feelings of independence or liberty had been wounded by what she had done. She had given herself to this young man freely, and she was so far incapable of grasping the frightful consequences of that gift. The future evaded her.

Her lover, however, had that low esteem for women which is common in young men who have only had to do with trollops, though he also had in him the rough kindness of a healthy male who enjoys life. To tell the truth, he soon forgot his remorse and stopped getting sentimental about Madeleine's fate. He was also, after his own fashion, quite soon in love with her himself. He thought her very lovely, and found pleasure in showing her to his friends. He treated her as his mistress, taking her out to Verrière Woods or some such place on Sundays, or to supper with his "married" friends during the week. They all ended by calling her simply Madeleine.

Perhaps she would have rebelled against this, had her lover not been so nice to her. He was a very cheerful soul, and used to make her laugh like a child, even at things which wounded her susceptibilities. Gradually, she accepted her position. Without her realizing it, her soul lost its original purity, and she grew accustomed to her shame.

The young man was a medical student who had been commissioned as army surgeon the very day before they met. He was now awaiting orders to go on service abroad. This however was long delayed, and Madeleine saw the months slip by, telling herself every night that perhaps the next day would see her a widow. She had thought she would spend at most a few weeks in Soufflot Street, but she spent a whole year there. At first, all she felt for the man with whom she lived was friendship. But when, after a couple of months, she began to feel anxiety about his leaving, it became a life of shocks, which little by little attached her to him. Had he left at once, she might have seen him go without too much heartache.

But this constant fear that she was to lose him and this constant regaining of him in the end served to bind her very closely to him. She never exactly fell in love with him, but rather received his imprint, felt herself become him, came to realize that he was gaining entire possession of her body and her soul too. And when this was accomplished he had become unforgettable to her.

One day, she went on a short trip with one of her newly gained women friends. This girl's name was Louise. She was the mistress of a law student, and was going to pay a visit to the child she had put out with a foster-mother about fifty miles from Paris. The idea was that the two young women would spend a couple of nights away. But the weather turned bad, and they returned a day earlier than they had planned. As she sat huddled in a corner seat, on the way back, Madeleine's mind dwelt with vague sadness on the sight she had just seen, the mother fondling her babe, the child's gurgling sounds, all of which had awakened a world of unknown emotions in her. All at once she found herself seized with terrible anxiety, thinking that she too might become pregnant. The thought too that the young man she was living with would have to leave very soon suddenly terrified her, as if it were an irreparable misfortune she had never thought of before. She then saw how she had fallen, how false and unhappy her position was. She could scarcely wait to get back and take her lover in her arms, to clasp her hands and beg him to marry her, never to leave her now.

She reached Soufflot Street in a state of fever. She had forgotten the fragile bond, which at any moment might be broken, which she had accepted. Now she in turn wanted to take complete possession of the man, memory of whom was to retain possession of her all her life. But when she opened the door of their room, it was to halt on the threshold, stupefied: stooping down by the window, her lover was in the act of fastening a trunk; at his side was a valise and a larger trunk, already fastened. Madeleine's own clothes and other belongings of hers were scattered over the bed. He had received urgent marching orders that very morning, and had had to make haste, packing, emptying drawers, separating what was his from what was hers. Under the impression that he really did feel a sense of shame, he had been anxious to get away before his mistress returned. A letter of explanation would then have sufficed as farewell.

When, turning round, he saw the young woman on the threshold, he could not help a gesture of sharp annoyance. He pulled himself

together, went up to her, and, with a rather strained smile, embraced her, and said: "My poor dear, the farewell hour has come. I had hoped to be away without ever seeing you again. That would have spared us both a painful scene. . . . Look, I've left all your things out on the bed."

Madeleine's strength failed her. Without even removing her hat, she slumped into a chair. She was very pale, and could not utter a word. Tearless and burning, her eyes flitted to and fro between the luggage and the heap of her own things on the bed. This brutal winnowing out of what was hers summed up the situation so clearly and so odiously. Their linen was no longer mingled in the same drawer. She was no longer anything at all to her lover.

He turned back to his trunk, and succeeded now in getting it fastened.

"I am being sent to the back of beyond," he ran on, trying now to laugh. "I am off to Cochin-China."

At last, she found her tongue.

"Very well," she said, "then I will come to the station to see you off."

She could not find it in herself to utter a single word of reproach to him. He had warned her of this, it was she who had wanted to stay. Nevertheless, her bowels revolted, she felt a crazy desire to cling to his neck, to beg him not to go. But her pride glued her to her chair. She wanted to seem calm, not to show the young man, now whistling calmly to himself, how badly his departure tore her heart.

Towards evening, some friends came round. They were all going to see him off. Madeleine smiled, her lover was all jokes, for this smile of hers was his support. He had never felt more than a warm friendship for her, and now, as he left, he was happy to see her so calm. But, as they entered the station waiting-room, he was unintentionally cruel.

"My pet," he said, "I'm not going to say 'wait for me!' . . . Find consolation. . . . Forget me." And he left her.

All this time, Madeleine had maintained a strange, agonized smile. Now she left the station, like an automaton, no longer aware of the ground under her feet. She did not even notice that one of the young surgeon's friends had taken her arm and was walking with her. She had been going like this, dazed, neither seeing nor hearing anything, for quarter of an hour, when the sound of somebody speaking broke into the quivering silence in her brain, and

gradually made her give ear in spite of herself. It was this other student. He was bluntly suggesting that now she was free she should set up house together with him. When at last she really understood what he was saying, she stared in horror at him, then, with a gesture of extreme disgust, snatched her arm away and ran up to her room, to lock herself in. Only now, quite alone, could she sob at will.

Her sobs were sobs of shame and despair. She was widowed, and the grief of pain of her desertion had just been sullied by a suggestion which seemed monstrous to her. Never till now had she so cruelly grasped the misery of her position. She was no longer even admitted to have the right to her own tears. They seemed to think that she had already succeeded in wiping from her flesh the kisses of her former lover. But she still felt them in her and told herself that they would never cease to scorch her. Lost in tears, she swore to herself that she would never know another man. She would be an eternal widow. She now understood how undying can be the bonds of the flesh. Any new love, she felt, would make a prostitute of her and put her at the mercy of avenging memory.

That night she did not sleep at the Soufflot Street room. The very same evening she took a room in another hotel, in Est Street. There she lived for two months, a lonely, wild-looking creature. For a moment she contemplated going into a nunnery. But for this she found that she lacked the necessary faith. While at the boarding-school they had spoken to her of God as if he were a handsome young man. She could not believe in such a God.

It was at this point that she had met Guillaume.

CHAPTER THREE

VÉTEUIL is a small town of 10,000 inhabitants situated on the borders of Normandy. The streets are clean and quiet. It is an out-of-the-way part. People who want to travel by rail have a twelve mile horse-coach journey to the nearest station, at Mantes. The country all round Véteuil is level and very fertile, endless lush meadowland intersected by curtains of poplars. There is a small river, eventually flowing into the Seine which winds its way through these broad, level lands, trailing a long ribbon of trees and reeds across them.

It was in this remote corner that Guillaume was born. His father, the Count of Viargue, was one of the last representatives of the old landed gentry of this part of the world. Born in Germany of a mother who was an émigré from the Revolution, he was brought to France as if this were foreign, enemy territory, when the Bourbons came back in. Driven brutally from her home by the Revolution, his mother by now reposed in a Berlin cemetery; the father had perished earlier, on the scaffold. The Lord of the Manor of Viargue could never forgive the soil which, drinking the blood of that victim of the guillotine, was never to cover the mortal remains of his poor mother. The Restoration installed him, however, on the family property, thus furnishing him with the noble prefix *de* and all that went with it. But despite this de Viargue never lost his hatred for France. To him it was a country under a curse, and he never did admit it to be his real fatherland. He buried himself away on the family estate, outside Véteuil, refusing any public position, turning the deaf ear to all the offers made by Louis XVIII and Charles X. He did not want to be anything to the nation which was guilty of the death of his parents, and would ever insist that he was really no Frenchman at all, the Germans were his compatriots, in France he was an exile.

He had however been still young when he came to France. Stalwart and of robust constitution, full of energy, he very soon found the idleness which he had deliberately adopted, terribly tedious. Though he thus insisted on living in isolation, far from any public event, he was far too intelligent and mentally restless to be

satisfied merely with the bucolic occupation of hunting. Suddenly aghast at the wearisome, empty life he had made for himself, he sought an occupation. By a contradictory quirk of nature, he loved scientific studies and that new, scientific way of thinking, the breath of which had upset that old world for which he mourned. Thus, though still dreaming of the splendours of the landed gentry under Louis XIV, he himself turned into a research chemist.

He made a strange scholar indeed, a lonely acolyte of science, studying and researching for himself alone. He transformed an enormous attic room of *Noiraude* (as the family mansion, five minutes out of Véteuil, was locally called), into a vast laboratory. Here he passed the livelong day, bent over retorts, with never-flagging enthusiasm and insatiable curiosity. He belonged to no scientific body, and if anybody did come wishing to talk about his efforts, he simply shut the door in their face. He wanted to be treated as the Lord of the Manor, and nothing but the Lord of the Manor, and under pain of instant dismissal none of his household ever dared mention what he was doing. As he saw it, his penchant for chemistry was a personal indulgence, into the secret lunacies of which nobody had the right to pry.

For nearly forty years, de Viargue every morning withdrew to his laboratory and locked the door. From that refuge, the common herd seemed to him even more worthy of his scorn. Though he would never admit it, he used to crystallize out his hatreds and his loves in his retorts and test-tubes. His powerful hands thus juggling with the elements, he could forget France, his guillotined father, and his mother buried in a foreign grave. The old-world nobleman was thus reduced to a haughty, ice-cold sceptic, the human being killed by the scientist.

Nor did any other person ever make the entry into that strange world. His acquaintances never knew what a gash had been cut in his heart. Confident that he at least had his finger on it, he kept the secret of that gaping wound to himself. He used to observe that, if he lived the life of a recluse, an exile, far from the world, that was because he despised the big and the little alike, classing even himself as a mere earthworm. For all that, he held himself erect, grave and supercilious, icy in manner, and never let that mask of pride fall from his countenance.

Nevertheless, there did occur one shock in that man's stilly existence. This was a scatter-brained young woman, married to a Véteuil solicitor, who threw herself into his arms. He was forty at

the time, and still treated his neighbours like feudal serfs. He took the young woman as mistress, making the whole business public knowledge for ten miles round, even having the effrontery to instal her at *Noiraude*. Never had the little township of Véteuil known such outrageous doings. De Viargue's disdainful manner had already set tongues wagging, but when he started living openly with this lawyer's wife he was very nearly stoned. A timid little fellow, terrified of losing his living, the husband lay low for the whole of the two years that the affair lasted. He turned a blind eye and a deaf ear too, making out that his wife was just staying out at *Noiraude* "for the air". Then the woman became pregnant, and had her baby at the mansion. A few months after this, however, she suddenly tired of her lover, who had once again begun to spend all his time in his laboratory, and one fine day, taking care to leave the babe behind her, returned to hubby. Grandly, the Lord of *Noiraude* refrained from running after her, while the lawyer accepted her back as calmly as if she really had been merely taking a short holiday away, the very next day parading through Véteuil with her on his arm, after which she was in fact a model wife. This outrageous business was still the talk of Véteuil twenty years after.

Guillaume, the child born of this strange love affair, was brought up at *Noiraude*. Having had this ephemeral passion for his mistress, his father accepted his fortuitous son with complete equanimity. Moreover, he kept the boy with him so that nobody should charge him with trying to conceal the living proof of his fit of madness. At the same time, since the memory of the lawyer's wife was distasteful to him, he avoided giving the child any attention, and the poor boy grew up in almost utter isolation. The mother, who did not even feel she ought to try to persuade her husband to move away from Véteuil, never once tried to see him. She realized now how foolish she had been and trembled to think what might have been the consequences of her mistake. As she was getting on in years, she listened to her good middle-class blood and became prudish and devout.

Guillaume's real mother was an old family domestic, who had actually ushered the father into this world. Geneviève was her name, and her mother had wet-nursed de Viargue's mother. She had then been taken to Germany by the Countess (who herself came of noble stock of the south), to be brought back to *Noiraude* as housekeeper by the son after the Restoration. Of Cévennes peasant stock, but of the reformed faith, excessively race and religion conscious, with

all the fanaticism of the early Calvinists implanted in her erect and passionate head, Geneviève was tall and spare, with sunken eyes and bony, eagle nose, reminiscent of those old hags with religious mania who once went to the stake. Wherever she went she dragged with her an enormous black Bible, the covers of which were furnished with a lock, and morning and night in high-pitched, penetrating voice would read a few verses out aloud. She had occasional fits of frenzy, and on such occasions her tongue would spit forth those savage words of wrath with which the terrible God of the Jews had been wont from time to time to flay His terrified people. But de Viargue always put up with what he used to call her loony ways. He was well aware of the high degree of probity and the ruling righteousness of the ageing religious maniac. Besides, he looked on Geneviève as a sacred legacy from his mother. She was less a servant of *Noiraude* than an all-powerful mistress of the house.

At sixty-six, she still accomplished a tremendous amount of work. She had a number of servants under her control, but it was her pride to perform the most menial tasks herself. She was obsessed by that humility which comes from unbelievable vanity. Up at break of day, she kept her finger on every single thing in the large house, offering everybody the example of her own tireless activity and performing her duties with the usual savagery of a woman who has never made a mistake.

One of the great sorrows of her life had been her master's devotion to his scientific studies. Seeing him closeted the whole day long in that room with all its clutter of weird apparatus, she really did think he had turned into a sorcerer. Passing by the door, and catching the sound of his bellows, she would clasp her hands in terror, convinced that he was blowing up the fires of hell. One day she actually summoned sufficient courage to go in to him and abjure him gravely in the name of his mother to save his soul by abandoning that accursed work he was at, but de Viargue merely edged her gently to the door, promising with a smile to make his peace with the Almighty later on, when it was time for him to die. After that episode, Geneviève prayed for him regularly night and morning. In a sort of prophetic frenzy she would sometimes insist that every night she heard Satan prowling round the old house, which was threatened by great misfortune.

The Count's shocking affair with the lawyer's wife Geneviève interpreted as a first manifestation of that coming wrath of God. The day that the woman moved in at *Noiraude*, she was seized with

a fit of pious indignation and told her master flatly that she could not live under the same roof as that wretched creature and she was going. She did indeed move out, taking up quarters in a lodge at the far side of *Noiraude* park, and throughout those two years she never set foot in the mansion itself. The local peasantry, passing along the park wall where it ran close to the lodge, used to catch the sound of Geneviève's harsh voice at all hours of the day, as she recited passages from the Bible. De Viargue let her have her head. He went to see her a number of times, with complete impassivity suffering the fierce sermonizing to which she subjected him. There was only one occasion when he very nearly did lose his temper. He was walking one day through the park with his mistress when they came upon the fanatical old thing, and Geneviève went so far as to attack the young woman with language of Old Testament vigour. With not a blemish in her own life, she would have liked to cast all the mire of the roads in the face of every sinning woman. The lawyer's wife had been very scared by what happened, and there is even reason to believe that the scorn and rage of the old Protestant had something to do with her sudden departure from *Noiraude.*

The moment that Geneviève learned that *Noiraude* was again clear of shame, she calmly resumed her rôle of sovereign mistress of the big house. The only change now was that there was this child, little Guillaume. All that time out at the lodge the thought of the infant had filled her with pious horror. The babe was the offspring of sin, which could not but bring evil fortune, and God the Avenger had quite possibly brought him into this world to punish his father for disregarding him. But when she set eyes on the poor little mite in its white and pink cradle she was overcome by a sudden surge of feelings of unwonted gentleness. This woman with heart and body dessicated in fierce, fanatical virginity dimly felt within her the awakening spouse and mother concealed in the heart of every virgin. She thought this the temptation of Satan and tried to stand up against this softening which had begun to take possession of her, but in the end she just gave way and, smothering the babe with kisses, was conscious merely of a desire to trust the Almighty would make her proof against this progeny of crime which Heaven must have cursed.

Thus gradually Geneviève became a mother to Guillaume, though a strange mother indeed, whose most affectionate gestures were always haunted by a hint of terror. There were indeed moments when she thrust the child from her, but only to take him into her

arms again with that venomous sensuality of the devout who believe they can feel the Evil One's claws entering their flesh. While the boy was still quite small, she would stare into his eyes uneasily, always wondering whether, deep in that pure, unsullied glance of the innocent child, she would not find the glint of hell fire. She never was able to convince herself that he did not belong a little to Satan, but for all that it was so tormented, so wild and so sentimental, her affection for Guillaume was none the less very moving.

The moment the boy was weaned, she dismissed the wet-nurse and herself looked after him entirely. The father had now left the child's care to her, even authorizing her, with the ironic grin of a man of science, to bring him up in whatever faith it pleased her. The hope of saving Guillaume from hell fire, by making a zealous Protestant of him, doubled Geneviève's devotion to him, and up to the age of eight she kept him constantly at her side in the rooms she occupied on the second storey of *Noiraude*.

Thus Guillaume grew up thoroughly highly strung. From the cradle he breathed the tense atmosphere of pious fears which the fanatical old woman spread about her. Awakening, he never saw bent over him any other countenance but those taciturn, intense features. All he heard to lull him to sleep at night was that strident psalm-chanting voice with lugubrious repetition of one of the seven psalms of penitence. His foster-mother's embraces themselves were shattering. She would crush him to her spasmodically to the point of suffocation, in her eyes tears which excited attacks of unhealthy sentiment in the child too. He thus acquired a tragic, feminine sensitivity, a frailty of nerves which made his slightest childhood sorrow into real suffering. Often his eyes too would fill with tears without any apparent reason. In such moments he was capable of weeping softly for hours, without any anger, like a grown-up.

When Guillaume was seven, Geneviève taught him to read from her big, iron-bound Bible. That book with its yellowed pages and dingy aspect used to terrify him. He could make no sense of the words he was forced to spell out, while the sinister tone in which his teacher pronounced the words froze him to his chair with awe. When alone, nothing in the world would have given him the courage to open that Bible. The old woman spoke of it to him with all the respect of fear, as if it were God Himself. From then on, as his intelligence began to stir, the boy lived in a sort of permanent state of terror. Shut up with this fanatical old woman, who incessantly

talked to him about Satan, Hell, and the wrath of Heaven, he passed whole days, wretched with scalding tears. All night long he would whimper, thinking that the flames of Hell were already lapping under his bed. Poor little creature, whose only real thought was to play and to laugh! His imagination was so disturbed that he did not even go out into the park, from fear of being damned. Every morning, in that strident voice, the screech of which stabbed him through like sharp knives, he heard Geneviève tell him that the world was an infamous place of perdition, and better for him to die than ever to have seen the sunlight. By this instruction, she thought to save him from Satan.

Nevertheless, there were occasions in the afternoons when Guillaume raced up and down the long corridors of *Noiraude* or ventured out under the trees in the park.

Noiraude was a big, square, three-storeyed building, ugly and dingy, very like a prison to look at. Its master was scornfully allowing it to fall into ruins. He himself occupied only a small part of it, some rooms on the first floor, the attic room which he had turned into a laboratory, and two rooms on the ground-floor, one kept as living-room, the other as drawing-room. All the rest of this enormous building, save for the rooms occupied by Geneviève and the servants, were totally neglected, never even aired.

When Guillaume trod the dark, silent corridors which ran through *Noiraude* in all directions, he lived through secret terrors. He would scurry past the doors of the unused rooms, holding his breath. Full of the revolting ideas with which Geneviève was always stuffing his head, he used to think he could hear moans and stifled sobbing coming from them, and in horror would wonder who it could be that lived in those never-opened rooms. He preferred the park alleys, and yet, to such a point had the old Protestant woman made a timorous little coward of him, he never dared venture far from the house.

Sometimes he would come across his father, and the sight of the old Count made him shake. Up to the age of five, he had hardly ever seen him. The Count de Viargue would come to forget altogether that he had a son. He had at first not even bothered his head about the formalities to be observed if one day he should wish to legitimize him. The registrar had had no other course but to register the boy as "of unknown parents". De Viargue knew that his lawyer would persist in pretending not to know his wife's illegitimate child even existed, but he always told himself that some time later

he would regularize Guillaume's position. Having no other successor, he reckoned to leave the boy all he had. Not that these matters really bothered his head very much. He was entirely preoccupied with his experiments, and had now become more sarcastic and supercilious than ever. When, at rare intervals, Geneviève gave him information about the child, he would always give an ear to what she had to say, but he never made any reply.

One day, going downstairs on his way out, he came upon the boy, hand in hand with the old housekeeper, and, seeing him already able to walk quite well, was most surprised to find him so grown-up. Guillaume was nearly five, and dressed in one of those delightful children's garments made of brightly-coloured, thin material. For the first time the father halted, to stare at the boy, and was rather moved. He took Guillaume up in his arms, raised him to eye-level, and studied him. By one of those mysterious tricks of the blood, the boy was remarkably like de Viargue's mother. This resemblance struck him and awakened keen sentiments. He planted a kiss on the poor little thing's forehead. The child was shaking all over.

From that day on, he never met his son without giving him a kiss. After his own fashion, as far as he was capable of loving anything, he was fond of the boy. His embrace, however, was always a chilly one, and the pecks he gave his son on such occasions in lieu of kisses were insufficient to touch the child's heart. Whenever Guillaume could avoid the Count without being noticed, he was almost hilarious at having escaped the gesture. The stern man whose presence was everywhere at *Noiraude*, an unbending, taciturn phantom, stirred terror rather than love in the boy's heart. Under instructions now to bring the boy up as the Count's son, Geneviève always depicted Guillaume's father to him as an awesome, all-powerful master, till in his mind the word father awakened only the notion of respectful fear.

Thus Guillaume de Viargue spent the first eight years of his life. Everything prompted him to weakness, both the extraordinary education which the old Protestant gave him and the fear instilled in him by the Count. But when the boy was eight, de Viargue sent him as a boarder to Véteuil Municipal Secondary School. Most likely he had now noticed the cruel upbringing that Geneviève was giving Guillaume, and wanted to remove him altogether from the influence of so unbalanced a brain. But at school Guillaume's first steps in life's apprenticeship were painful. He was to be hurt at every step.

Those years he spent as a boarder were one long martyrdom, one of those martyrdoms of the lonely, abandoned child over whom everybody rides roughshod, and who can never understand what he has done wrong. Véteuil people anyway felt a sly hatred of de Viargue, originating in a mixture of jealousy and prudery. They never forgave him his money and ability to do what he liked, and the scandalous business connected with Guillaume's birth served them without end as a hook to hang their spite on. Avenging themselves for the supercilious indifference of the father, to whom they still humbly touched their caps, they took it out on the weakling of a son, being able to break the boy's heart with impunity. Véteuil boys, those who were twelve or thirteen, all knew the whole story, having heard it a hundred times over at home. In the domestic circle the adulterous child had been discussed with such indignation that as soon as they had him as schoolfellow they made a point of torturing this miserable little creature whom all Véteuil scorned. Their parents even egged them on to this poltroonery, and there was many a sly laugh about the way they persecuted their victim.

By the malicious attitude of his new comrades, in the very first recreation time at school, Guillaume was made to feel that he was in hostile country. Two of the bigger ones, young rascals of fifteen, went up to him and asked him his name. When he replied timidly that he was called Guillaume, the whole horde of them set about mobbing him.

"Your name's Bastard, do you hear?" cried a ringleader, who already had all the waggery and the dirty language of a grown-up, while the others booed and made dirty jokes about the matter.

Guillaume did not understand the insult, but, with that crowd gathered all round him, he at once burst into tears of mortification and terror. Buffeted first on one side, then on another, he tried to apologize right and left, all to the amusement of the young scoundrels, who of course thought the little word "sorry" deserved another bout of jostling.

That was enough to make the jape a permanent one. The school now had its victim. Every break, Guillaume was jostled about and called *Bastard*, which made him blush without knowing why. Fear of blows made him cowardly. He began to lurk in corners, afraid to budge out of them, a pariah with everybody against him, and no courage to rebel. His teachers tacitly joined with their pupils. They thought it smart to join with the bigwigs of Véteuil, so they heaped punishments on the boy and found a malicious pleasure in this

tormenting of a weakling. Guillaume merely submitted, and became a most wretched little schoolboy, brutalized by blows, insults and lines. Sluggish, sickly, dazed, he sobbed many a night through in the dormitory, and those tears were his only protest.

He suffered the more since he had in him a burning need to love somebody, and all he found was people to hate. His over-sensitive nerves made him cry out with agony at every new insult. "Dear heaven!" he would often ask himself. "What sin can I have committed?" With childlike logic he tried to imagine what it could be that brought such harsh penance down on him. And, finding no answer, he was overcome with insane fears, recalling Geneviève's terrifying teachings, and thinking himself tormented by demons for unknown sins. Twice it came into his head to drown himself in the school well. He was twelve at the time.

During the holidays he used to feel he had escaped from a tomb. Often the young hooligans of Véteuil chased him to the town gates, but now the deserted park of *Noiraude*, where nobody ever struck him, became very precious to him. He never dared tell his father about the persecutions he had to endure. He complained only to Geneviève and asked her the meaning of that surname of Bastard which made his cheeks burn as if they had been smacked. The old woman heard his enquiry with a grim expression on her face. She had been annoyed to have had her pupil taken from her. She knew that the almoner of the school had persuaded Viargue to let the boy be christened in the Catholic faith, so she now thought him consigned for ever to hell fire. Hence, when Guillaume told her his sorrows, she did not give him a straight answer, but cried: "You are a son of sin, you are expiating the sin of those who are really at fault!" He failed to understand, but the fanatical old woman seemed so outraged that he never confided in her again.

The older he grew, the worse his sufferings became. At last he reached the age at which he knew what sin he was charged with. The other boys' dirty insults now provided him with a course in vicious living. He wept tears of blood. They struck at him through his parents, acquainting him with the story of his birth in a shameful way. By the foul names given to the woman in question on all sides, he first learned the existence of his mother. When children descend to filth, they grovel in it with a sort of vanity. Hence the young men of this school never spared their "Bastard" any foulness they could concoct about the love affair between the lawyer's wife and the Comte de Viargue. There were occasions when Guillaume was

seized with insane anger. One day, assailed with blows, the little martyr revolted at last, seized the nearest boy and bit him like a wild animal. But as a rule he just submitted to insults, his only solace being his silent tears.

When he was nearly fifteen, something happened which he was never to forget. The school was out in the town for a school walk, when he heard his schoolfellows cackling all round him and their malicious whispers: "Look, Bastard, look, there's your mother!"

He raised his head and did look. He saw a woman come past them, on the arm of a weak-faced, placid-looking man, and this woman gave him a curious look. Her skirts almost touched him as she passed. But not a smile came from her, instead, she pursed her lips primly. The man at her side was utterly unmoved.

Guillaume's heart sank into his boots. He heard nothing of the mockery of his school-fellows, who were choking with laughter, as if the encounter had been a wonderful piece of fun. He strode on, in savage silence. The fleeting vision of that woman had frozen his heart. He felt more wretched than any orphan. Throughout his life, whenever he thought of his mother, he was to see in his mind's eye those pursed-up, pious lips of the woman as she primly tripped along on the arm of a husband content to be the cuckold.

His great unhappiness in these bad years came from being loved by nobody. Geneviève's fierce affection was almost terrifying to him, while he found his father's mute love very chilly. He told himself that he was alone in the world, nobody was sorry for him. Yielding to the persecution he endured, he found solace in dreams of inexpressible kindness. With its burning need for signs of affection, his gentle nature—as if this were something ridiculous, which would be laughed at—took great pains to hide its storehouse of love for which it could find no object. He sank into endless dreams of a great love into which he would one day lose himself for all time. In this passion he dreamed that he would achieve the great mercy of solitude, a corner of country with trees and water, where he would live alone with this great love, but whether it was a woman he loved or another man, he was never quite clear, for his needs boiled down quite simply to a desire for consolation and peace. When assailed by his companions and battered about he would clasp his hands and in a sort of religious exaltation conjure up that dream, asking heaven when he might at last be able to find refuge and rest in one supreme attachment.

Had his pride not maintained him, he might easily have grown

inured to this state of dejection, but, fortunately, he had de Viargue blood in him, and there came moments when the breath of pride deriving from his father stiffened him against the incurable weakness which his chance birth and his mother's middle-class silliness had bequeathed to him. In such moments he felt himself better, more worthy and a bigger man than his torturers. If he feared them, he also scorned them. Under their blows he was still proud, and it was of course really this that enraged the young brutes, who fully realized now that their victim despised them.

However, Guillaume did acquire one friend while at school. Just as he was starting his fifth form, a new pupil joined and was placed in the same form. This was a sturdy, powerfully-built lad named Jacques Berthier, two or three years older than he was. An orphan, his only surviving relative an uncle who was a solicitor at Véteuil, Jacques had come here to continue the classical schooling he had begun in Paris. Having been told that the boy was old for his age and at seventeen had been messing about with hussies of the Latin quarter, his uncle wanted to have him under his eye.

Jacques bore his exile from Paris cheerfully. There never was a more cheerful character. Outstanding in nothing, he was just what one calls a good companion. What is more, he made up for his frivolous character by an ability for stubborn devotion. His entry at the school was an event in itself, for he was a Parisian and could talk about life with some knowledge, from having nibbled at the forbidden fruit. His school mates had a covert respect for him from the moment that they knew he had slept with girls. His easy manner, his physical strength, his knowledge of the fair sex, at once made him the king of the school. Ever boisterously laughing and ever ready to exhibit his powerful biceps, he protected the weak with all the benevolence of a great prince.

On his very first day, he saw a young scoundrel setting about Guillaume. He at once ran up, gave the bully a shaking and said that if he wanted to molest young ones he was going to have to reckon with him. Then, slipping his arm in that of the bully's victim, he strolled up and down with him all through recreation period. This of course was the talk of the school at once. Nobody could understand how this great man from Paris could choose such a companion.

Guillaume was touched to the quick by the assistance and friendship which Jacques proffered him, Jacques for his part having suddenly felt a fellow-feeling for his tormented young friend. One

or two questions were enough to show him at once that he was going to have to show continuous protection here, and that decided him.

"Want to be my pal?" he asked Guillaume. He held out his hand, and the poor boy nearly wept when he shook it, the first hand ever offered him.

"I will be a very good pal," he assured the bigger boy, in the timid tones of a lover avowing his love.

The following break, a group of other pupils crowded round the Parisian lad to give him the lowdown on Guillaume, thinking they would thoroughly blacken the "Bastard's" name by telling the story of his origin. But Jacques, despite all the dirty twists the others gave it, heard the story utterly unmoved. When they had finished, he shrugged his shoulders and all he said was: "What a lot of idiots you fellows are. If I hear any one of you repeat what you've just told me, he'll get a sock on the jaw from me."

Now that he grasped the extent of his wounds, he merely felt more kindly towards the pariah than ever. At the Charlemagne Lycée in Paris he had already had a friend who was a child of free love, and this had been a lad of rare intelligence and charm, who had taken all the form prizes and been the idol of comrades and teachers alike. This resulted in Jacques' taking the story of the great scandal which so outraged all the young savages of Véteuil as the most natural thing in the world. Turning to Guillaume, he took his arm.

"What silly coons these kids are," he said. "They are both silly and nasty. I know all about it, but don't you worry any more. If any of them touches you, just tell me, and you'll see."

From that day on, the "Bastard" was treated with respect. When one pupil did dare use the word, he got such a clout that the whole school realized that an end had come to their joking, so they turned to find some other victim. Guillaume went through both his two last years at school in complete peace. For his protector he conceived a devoted friendship, loving him as a man loves his first sweetheart, with absolute faith and blind devotion. At last his gentle nature had found somebody on whom to lavish his affections, and all that was pent up in him went to this god whose hand and heart had aided him. Mingled with his friendship was a gratitude so lively that he looked on Jacques as almost a superior being. He did not know how he could return the debt, and, invariably doting and humble, admired Jacques' least gesture. When he compared him with his own timid, shy nature, this hefty lad, with all his noisy energy, excited

him to deepest respect. Jacques' easy manners and the stories he told of his Parisian life convinced him that he had for friend an extraordinary character destined for very elevated things. There was thus in his attachment a strange medley of admiration, humility and affection, which maintained in him both feelings of tenderness and respect towards Jacques.

In his genial way Jacques was quite ready to accept his protégé's worship. He was fond of showing how strong he was and he liked flattery. At the same time, he was really captivated by the devoted little attentions of this other lad, who was at once so weak and so proud, and so devastating to others by reason of his scorn for them. During the two years they spent together at school, the two were inseparable.

When they had passed the first part of their matriculation, Jacques went back to Paris, where he was to study medicine. Left alone at *Noiraude*, for a long time Guillaume was quite inconsolable. He lapsed into complete idleness, for all the world like a man marooned in a desert. He was now eighteen. One day his father sent for him to his laboratory. It was the first time that Guillaume had entered the place. He found the old Count in the centre of this enormous room, over his chest a blue chemist's apron. De Viargue seemed to have aged terribly. His hair had receded from his temples, and with a strange gleam his eyes stared out of the depths of cavernous sockets lost in a network of wrinkles. Guillaume had always felt enormous respect for his ageing father, but today he felt something more akin to fear.

"Young man," said de Viargue, "I have sent for you to inform you what I have in mind for you. But be so good first as to tell me if you have an inclination towards any particular occupation?"

When Guillaume's only response to this demand was an embarrassed, indeterminate gesture, the Count resumed: "Good, then my wishes will be the easier for you to fulfil. . . . Young man, I want you to be nothing at all. Neither doctor, nor lawyer, nor anything else!"

And, when Guillaume stared at him in astonishment, he continued, with some bitterness: "You will be very well off, so, if you are lucky enough to understand life, you can be both a fool and a happy man. I am already sorry I had you taught anything at all. Hunt, keep a good table, and sleep your fill, those are my instructions. And if you feel you absolutely must do something, then scratch our bit of land."

De Viargue was not joking. He spoke curtly because he was sure of being obeyed, then, noticing his son glance round the laboratory,

as if in protest against the idle life imposed on him, he added threateningly:

"Above all, I want your word of honour that you will not indulge in scientific studies. After my death, please lock the door of this room and never open it again. Enough for one of our line to have found the oblivion of a life-time here. . . . I count on you to do as I say. You are to do nothing and you are to try to enjoy life."

Here, Guillaume would have withdrawn, but, apparently urged by sudden pain and emotion, his father suddenly took him by the wrists and, drawing him towards him, muttered again: "Understand, boy, do as I say. . . . Be a simpleton, if you can." Then, hastily and clumsily, he gave Guillaume a kiss and dismissed him.

Guillaume found this scene strangely upsetting. He realized that in secret his father too had been suffering all this time. From this day on, whenever they met, he now showed the old man a warmer respect. Apart from that, he conformed strictly to his orders. He spent the next three years at *Noiraude*, hunting, riding, interesting himself in the woodlands and fields of the estate, and the three years spent in this quiet bucolic manner finally moulded him for the delights and the torments which the future held in store for him. Lost in the depths of green solitude of the great park, with all the freshness which the wind coming in from the open countryside sent shivering through its foliage, he at last shook off the last traces of his school life and grew up into a highly sensitive but charitable soul. The fantasies of his early days came back to him. Once again he dreamed that beside some fountain pool he would find a lovely maiden whom he would take in his arms and, showering kisses on her as on a child, bear her away with him. Oh, what endless reveries those were, and how wonderful the silence and the shade with which the great oaks soothed his brow.

Indeed, had those unsatiated yearning dreams not also filled him with a vague disquiet he would have been perfectly happy. Nobody any longer persecuted him. When he had to go in to Véteuil, he saw former schoolfellows salute him with more servility than they had ever mustered cruelty. The town knew that he was the heir to the title and the estate. His only fear now, one which was strangely confused with a burning hope, was to find himself one day face to face with his mother. However, he never did see her again, and was most unhappy because of this. Not a day passed but he thought of her. The complete indifference which she showed regarding him was so monstrous and inexplicable to him that he would have liked to

discover the reason for it. He even asked Geneviève if he should not try to have an interview with her. But the old Protestant housekeeper told him bluntly that he was crazy even to think of it.

"Your mother is dead," she added, with the ringing accents of inspiration. "Pray for her."

Despite the fears which her affection for him engendered in her, Geneviève had never ceased to love this child of sin. Now that the child had grown to manhood, she fought against her feelings more than even. But at bottom she was blindly, absolutely devoted to him.

Twice, Jacques came to *Noiraude* to spend a long vacation there. Those were for Guillaume weeks of mad delight. The two friends were inseparable. They went hunting for days on end, they fished for crayfish in the little river which meandered through the estate. Often enough, seated in some sheltered, quiet nook, they would sit and talk of Paris, especially of women. Jacques ran lightly on about that subject, as one who put little value on the creatures, but was fair enough to speak decently about them, never quite calling a spade a spade. To this Guillaume replied by reproaching him hotly for his lack of spiritual fervour. It was Guillaume's way to put woman on a pedestal, turning her into an idol, to which he was prepared to sing endless songs of faith and love.

"Oh, drop it, man!" cried the medical student, losing patience one day. "You just don't know what you are talking about. If you're always going to go on your knees to them, you're certainly going to get on your mistresses' nerves. But don't you worry, you'll do just what everybody else does, you'll deceive them all and be deceived yourself. That's life."

"Not at all," replied Guillaume, stubbornly. "I shall certainly not do what everybody else does. I shall love only one woman, and her I shall love so much that I defy fate to ever disturb the affection between us."

"Twaddle! You'll see and so shall I!"

And Jacques laughed heartily at his delightful country-bumpkin's naïveté, and nearly succeeded in shocking him completely by telling him all the girls he had once had in a single night. Nevertheless these trips of Jacques to *Noiraude* did by and large bind the two young men faster than ever in friendship. In addition, they wrote each other long letters, though Jacques' gradually became farther spaced, till after three years a whole year went round without a word from him.

Guillaume was saddened by this silence, but from Jacques' uncle

he learned that Jacques was due to leave France. However, he would very much have liked to shake his friend's hand again before he left. He now began to find his life at *Noiraude* terribly tedious. At last his father learned the cause of his unhappy air and general debility, and one day, as they were finishing lunch, the old man said: "I know you would like to go to Paris. Very well, I agree. Go, and spend a whole year there. I am sure you will make a fool of yourself somehow, but I will open an unlimited account for you. . . . You can go tomorrow."

The following day, reaching Paris, Guillaume learned that Jacques had left for Cochin-China the previous day, and had written him a farewell letter, which in due course Geneviève sent on. In this most high-spirited and affectionate epistle his friend informed him that he had been appointed surgeon to the French expeditionary corps out there, and would probably spend a long time abroad.

Guillaume went straight back to *Noiraude*. He was hurt by this sudden departure of Jacques and staggered by the idea of being alone in a strange city. He plunged back into his beloved solitude. However, two months later his father again prodded him out of it and instructed him to return to Paris, where the old fellow counted on his son's spending a whole year.

Guillaume then established himself in an hotel in Est Street. This was the hotel in which Madeleine was living.

CHAPTER FOUR

When Madeleine met Guillaume, she had just made up her mind to leave the hotel and find a tiny flat which she would furnish. In this hotel, open to every Tom, Dick and Harry, and with its clientèle of students and good-time girls, she was far from having any seclusion, but apt at any moment to be pestered with blunt suggestions which were always harsh reminders of her utter loneliness. Once she had found a place of her own, she counted on applying her gifts as embroidress, though, as far as that went, her two thousand francs a year income were sufficient for her needs. She in fact was beginning to be rather worried about the future. She had a feeling that the lonely life to which she had resolved to condemn herself would be fraught with dangers. However much she promised herself to be strong, her days had now become so empty and so dismal that there were evenings when her utter dejection produced such weakness that she caught herself thinking very unedifying thoughts.

The very night when Guillaume took a room at the hotel, she came upon him on the stairs, and he at once drew back against the wall with such consideration that she found the gesture both startling and disturbing. As a rule, the other guests, puffing tobacco smoke in her face, more or less trod on her toes. Having let her pass, the young man actually entered the room next to her own, with only a thin partition separating them, and as she went to sleep Madeleine found herself involuntarily listening to this masculine stranger walking to and fro as he settled in.

For his part, Guillaume had not been too discreet to take good stock of his neighbour's mother-of-pearl skin and wonderful auburn hair, and the reason for him walking up and down so much that night was really that the thought of this young woman being so close to him seemed to go to his head. He could even hear the young lady's bed creak whenever she moved.

The following day, the two young people gave each other unaffected smiles. After that, their acquaintanceship was of quick growth. Madeleine found it all the easier to yield to her liking for this gentle, quiet young fellow since she felt quite safe with him. She tended to look on him as a child, and told herself that if ever he

were so silly as to mention love to her, she could easily overcome his desires with a good talking-to. She thought herself strong, and intended to keep her oath to remain true to the man who had gone out of her life for ever. A few days later, however, she had accepted Guillaume's arm, and consented to go for a little stroll with him. And when they came back to the hotel, she went into his room, and he into hers. Not that the least word of tenderness or any troublesome smile passed between them. They just treated each other like new-found friends, and this with a restraint which had much subtle enchantment in it.

Deep down, however, they were both rather upset, and when they had retired for the night, they listened to each other's movements and wondered, without either being quite clear about the feelings which were troubling them. The truth was that Madeleine was ignorant of love. Her first affair had had in it that element of hurry which made Guillaume's attentions most enjoyable to her. Gradually, despite herself, she felt her heart go out to him, and was already the victim of a liking for him which verged on real sentiment. If she did still recall her wounded heart, she was now inclined to bury those memories which hurt by giving her mind to her new friend. She had been carried off her feet by the fierce wooing of a man of full-blooded temperament, but now it was the tender affection of a self-effacing character that had begun to enter her being and one by one the tranquil sentimentality of it served to loosen the bonds placed on her will.

Guillaume now lived entirely in a world of dream, worshipping this girl, the first to cross his path, and this was fatal for him. In the early stages he did not even ask himself her origin. She had been the first to give him a smile, and that smile had been enough to bring him to his knees, laying his life at her feet. Light-heartedly he marvelled that he should without any delay have come across such a sweetheart, but he was certainly all haste to lay bare to her the heart which for so long he had kept closed, with all its pent-up passion. If so far he had not kissed Madeleine, this was merely from lack of courage. But he was quite sure already that she was his.

Thus the two young people had passed a week. In that time Guillaume hardly went out at all. Paris frightened him, and he had taken pains not to put up at one of the big hotels of which his father had given him the addresses. He was now patting himself on the back for having found this secluded little place behind the Luxembourg Park, in the heart of a quiet district, where love had been

awaiting him. His only other desire was to take Madeleine out into the open country, far away from bricks and mortar, not with the ultimate design of bringing her the sooner into his embrace, but merely because he loved trees and wanted to stroll in their shade with her. For a time he resisted the idea, by a sort of presentiment, but at last she had consented to go out to dinner with him at one of the inns in the woods outside Paris. And there, in this inn out at Verrière Woods, she had now yielded to him.

The next day, when they returned to Paris, the two lovers were so abashed by their adventure that they even forgot to talk to each other—as they had begun to do—as intimates, but for a while became quite formal with each other again. They felt a sort of embarrassment, an uneasiness they had never known so long as they had been simply friends. From a striking sense of modesty, they now actually decided no longer to go on living in the same hotel, in which, after all, only a day or two ago they had been practically strangers. Guillaume guessed that were Madeleine to share his room, the knowing grins of the porters would hurt her, so that very same night he moved to a neighbouring hotel.

Besides, now that she was his, he wanted to have this young woman absolutely to himself, snug in a private nook of their very own. He behaved as if on the point of getting married. On his request, the banker with whom his father had opened an account found him a small detached house for sale in Boulogne Street. Guillaume rushed off to have a look, and bought the place on the spot. Without delay he had a furnishing firm in and in a few days it was ready to live in. All this took the inside of a week. Then, one evening, he took Madeleine's hands in his, and asked her to go there to live with him.

Ever since that night at the inn out at Verrière, he had called on her every afternoon, just like any fiancé doing his formal courting. After a short stay, he invariably withdrew discreetly. His formal suggestion now touched the young woman's heart, and by way of response she flung her arms round his neck and consented, and that very night settled in at the little house in Boulogne Street, and here their real nuptial night took place. They now seemed to have forgotten the trick of chance which a few nights back had so suddenly thrown them into each other's arms, and behaved as if only now could they exchange their first kisses. There followed a night of great gladness and sweetness, in which the two lovers might well think the past for ever dead and their union endowed with all the purity and strength of an everlasting bond.

Here in Boulogne Street they lived for six months, cut off from the world, scarcely ever going out. It was a real dream of happiness. Lulled in their mutual affection, they completely forgot the facts which had led up to their love for each other and were utterly untroubled about what the future might hold for them. They were beyond such considerations, above them, their hearts completely serene, in a felicitous peace which nothing could disturb. The little house, its small rooms gay with carpets and bright curtaining, provided them with a lovely nook, silent, shut-away, smiling. There was also a garden, a little patch of soil, where despite the cold they forgot themselves in soft talk on lovely winter afternoons.

Madeleine felt she had been born anew. She did not know if she loved Guillaume, she only knew that in her heart this man induced a serene delight in which it was good to dream time away. All her wounds were healed. She no longer felt those pangs or smarts which had rent her bosom. She was snug, with a tranquil but never-changing glow at heart. She never asked herself questions. She might have been recently ill with acute fever. As if suddenly recovered from an illness accompanied by high fever, she now luxuriated in the sensous delights of convalescence, grateful to the depths of her soul to the man who had appeared, to rescue her from her heart's pangs. What touched her most were not the young man's ardent embraces, for as a rule her own feelings lay dormant and her kisses were more maternal than passionate. She was moved by the great respect which he showed her and the dignity with which he made her all but his legitimate wife. In her eyes, this placed him on a pedestal, and she could fancy that she had passed straight from her mother's arms to those of her spouse. This dream, born of her sense of shame, flattered her pride and pandered to all her feelings of innocence. Thus she was able to hold her head high, and all the affection she now showed Guillaume, all her tranquillity and that smiling hope she felt, she owed to her complete oblivion of wounds which had ceased to bleed.

Guillaume was in the seventh heaven. At long last his dearest dream of childhood and adolescence was coming true. At school, martyrized by the blows of his schoolfellows, he had dreamt of a happy retreat, a hidden secluded nook, lost in the depths of which he would spend long days of inactivity, suffering no blows, on the contrary caressed by a kind, gentle fairy who would never leave his side. And later, when at eighteen vague longings began to throb in his blood, he had resumed that dream under the trees of *Noiraude*

park, beside the clear waters, the place of the fairy taken by a sweetheart. He had wandered on, following the thickets through, always in the hope, at the next turn of the path, of meeting with that precious grace. Today Madeleine was the kind, gentle fairy, the mistress whom he had sought, his too, in the dreamed-of retreat, remote from all the din, deep in a nook where no being could come to disturb his ecstatic delight. Here he found the supreme happiness, knowing himself out of this world, no longer fearing anybody could wound him, utterly abandoned to the touching peace of his heart, beside him only this lovely girl, by whose loveliness and love he would live. This life he now led was consolation for his youth of pain. Hitherto he had known no affection. His father had been distant and sarcastic, and there had been that fanatic old housekeeper whose very tendernesses struck terror, and then a friend who was never enough to assuage his feverish devotion. And after annihilating persecution, then martyrized childhood, and finally exiled youth, one long chain of suffering, which had filled him with a fierce longing for complete shadow and utter silence, here at last his tortured being found blissful annihilation in endless gentleness. Thus, a man both fatigued and happy, he found rest and refuge in Madeleine's arms. All his pleasure was in this tranquillity. It was such peace as seemed it would never have an end. He could imagine eternity lay before him, that eternity which most men spend in the grave, but he could drowse away in this young woman's arms.

Thus as lovers they did not so much give each other real love as ultimate peace. It seemed that chance had brought them together, so that they might mutually heal each other's gaping wounds. They both felt the same need for rest, and their mutual caresses were like acts of gratitude which in those hours of happy peace which they spent together they were able to afford each other. With the self-centredness of the starving, they enjoyed every day as it came. They had the impression of never having existed before they met. Never a memory interrupted their long lovers' talks. Guillaume cared no longer about the years which Madeleine had lived before she knew him, nor did the young woman ever think of interrogating him, as loving women sometimes will, about his former life. All they required was to be side by side, laughing together, happy as children who neither regret the previous day nor worry about the morrow.

One day, news of Lobrichon's death reached Madeleine. All she said was: "He was not a nice character."

Apart from this she was indifferent, and Guillaume never seemed

to take the least interest in the information. When letters reached him from *Noiraude*, he glanced them over and tossed them into a drawer, and Madeleine never asked him what they were about. After six months of such a life they were as much strangers as they had been the first day. They had loved each other without ever seeming to know each other.

This dream had a rude awakening.

One morning, when Guillaume had gone round to see his banker, Madeleine, for want of something better to do, began turning the pages of a photograph album which was lying about, and she had not seen before. Guillaume had come upon it in a trunk, the previous evening. There were only three portraits in it—his father, Geneviève and his friend Jacques.

When the young woman's eyes lit on this last portrait, she uttered a moan. Her hands resting on the opened pages, she stood rigid, but she trembled all over as with horror she contemplated Jacques' smiling features. It was as if a ghost had risen to face her. Yes, it was Jacques, it was that chance lover of a single night who had become the lover of a year, it was the man whose memory, dormant in her bosom, was now awakened and by this sudden sight of the photograph lacerated her heart.

She was thunderstruck. Her peaceful sky was peaceful no longer. She had forgotten this man and become Guillaume's loyal wife. Why had Jacques thus risen between them? Why was he there, in this room where only a few minutes since her dear one had held her in his arms? Who was responsible for bringing him here, for ever to ruin her peace? These questions brought desperation to her dazed mind.

With that slightly mocking air of his, Jacques stared out at her. He seemed to be taunting her for her sentimental love. He was saying: "Good lord, my poor kid, how utterly bored you must be here! Come on, let's go out to Chatou, quick, anywhere where there is a bit of company and life. . . ." She could hear the very sound of his voice and those boisterous bursts of laughter of his. She could picture him about to offer her his arm, with a gesture so familiar. In a flash she lived through the past again, saw that room in Soufflot Street, saw all the life she had thought so far from her, now several months away. So she had been dreaming. Yesterday's happiness was not for her. She had lied and she had stolen. All the uncleanliness in which she had set her feet now rose to her heart and choked her.

The photograph depicted Jacques in all the carefreeness of his

student life. He was sitting straddled on an upturned chair, in shirt-sleeves, throat and arms bare, puffing at a clay pipe. Madeleine could make out a birth-mark which he had on his left arm, and recalled how often she had kissed that spot. Her memories were like a burning smart. She was back in her sufferings, in a putrid back-wash of the bodily indulgence this man had taught her. There he was, half naked, and at any moment he might take her to him. About her very loins she seemed to feel the so familiar grip of that former lover. She was shattered as she sank into an armchair, felt that she was prostituting herself, stared wildly about her with the sudden spasm of terror of an adulteress. The little sitting-room meantime retained its discreet silence, its gentle shadows. It was full of that luxuriant peace which six months of love can bring to a secluded room. On a panel above the settee was a portrait of Guillaume, and this man was smiling affectionately down at her. But, precisely under that loving glance, she felt the colour leave her cheeks, as in the stillness of this retreat she felt Jacques' body take hers and rend her flesh apart.

Then she remembered. Before he left, the young surgeon had given her this portrait, or rather, one exactly like this one which some cruel fate now confronted her with. On the eve of her joining Guillaume she had felt it her duty to burn that picture of Jacques, for she did not wish to take the features of her first lover into Guillaume's home. Now that photograph had risen from the dead, and Jacques, despite her, had penetrated to her retreat. Rising from the chair, she closed the album. As she did do, on the back of the photograph she read: *To my old friend, my brother Guillaume.* Guillaume, the friend, *the brother* of Jacques? Deathly pale, Madeleine closed the album and fell back into her chair. For a long time she lay there, hands helpless at her side, eyes staring blankly ahead, thinking.

She told herself now that she must be guilty of some great sin, to suffer such punishment for her six months of happiness. She had let two different men hold her in their love embrace, and what was more, these were two men as fond of each other as brothers. In this double love she saw a sort of incest. In those former days in the Latin quarter she had known a girl who was shared by two friends, and without turning a hair passed from the bed of one to the bed of the other. Suddenly that unhappy woman came to her mind, and with loathing she told herself that she herself was equally degraded. Now, she knew only too well, she would be possessed by Jacques'

phantom whenever she gave herself to Guillaume; she might even come to find a monstrous pleasure in such joint embraces of two lovers whom in herself she confused, and in that instant she saw her troubled future so clearly that it came into her mind to flee at once and disappear for ever.

She was overcome again by fear. Only yesterday she had been so happy in the quiet, comfortable breath of Guillaume's fond love. Would she then not be able once more to find peace in the young man's arms, once more forget and consider herself worthy and loyal? She asked herself now whether it would not be better to tell Guillaume everything, confide her past to him, and thus absolve herself. But the idea of such an avowal terrified her. How would she ever find the courage to tell Guillaume that she was the cast-off mistress of that friend of his who was like a brother? Guillaume would cast her from him, drive her from his bed. Guillaume would never accept the degradation of such a sharing. Thus she reasoned, as if Jacques might be there again to take her, so vividly did she feel him in her.

She decided in the end to say nothing, to keep all her shame to herself. Yet she could not quite accept that way out. Her straightforward nature rebelled at the notion of living an eternal lie, she understood that she would not be able long to find the strength to go on smiling in such a state of degradation and distress. Far better confess at once, or leave Guillaume right away. Most painfully, these stormy thoughts reverberated in her head while, still unable quite to make up her mind, she examined her own heart.

All at once she heard the outer door open and swift steps on the stairs. Guillaume entered the room, his face twisted with grief. Without a word he flung himself down on a couch and burst into sobs. Madeleine was so surprised and so frightened too that for a moment she thought he had somehow learned the whole truth.

She rose to her feet and trembled all over. Guillaume was still sobbing, his face in his hands, obviously shaken by some great grief. At last, holding out a hand to her, in a choking voice he begged her to be his consolation.

"How awful, how awful!" he cried.

She sat down by his side, fearful of understanding him, yet wondering if it really was possible that she had caused his grief. Then, forgetting her own troubles, she took his hands in hers.

"Tell me, my dearest," she cried, "whatever is the matter?"

In dismay, he stared at her.

"I nearly broke down in the street," he stammered, through his tears. "I ran all the way, it choked me, I wanted to get home quickly. Let me cry, it does me good to cry. . . ." Wiping away his tears, he choked again and once more broke into sobs.

"God, oh God! To think I shall never see him again, never!" he cried.

Only now, Madeleine thought she understood. A wave of sympathy flooded through her. She drew him into her arms, kissed his forehead, wiped away his tears, and full of pity tried to console him.

"You have lost your father?" she said.

He shook his head. Then, clasping his hands, in the broken tones of people who see no hope, "My poor Jacques," he cried, "never more will I have your love. . . . And so happy am I now, I had forgotten all about you, never even thought of you, and you lying dead!"

At the sound of this name, Madeleine had again started up, still clinging to the handkerchief with which she had been mopping Guillaume's streaming cheeks. She stood there, shaking from head to foot. Jacques—dead? The news descended on her as if with a dull thud. Aghast, she seemed to be wondering whether she herself had not unwittingly killed this man, merely to get him out of her life.

"You never knew him." Guillaume said. "I don't think I ever even spoke of him to you. It was heartless of me, but our happiness made me forgetful. . . . Jacques was a man with a heart of gold. He was all devotion. He is the only friend I ever had in the world. Before meeting you, I had known only one person's love—his. You two were the only people who ever gave me their hearts. And now I have lost him. . . ." Catching his breath with a sudden sob, he continued: "At school the others all used to bully me, till he came to take my part. He saved me from tears, he offered me his friendship and protection—yes, offered them to *me*, who had lived like a pariah, scorned and mocked by everybody. When I was a lad, I worshipped him as if he were a god. I would have knelt before him, had he asked me to pray to him. I owed him so much that I used to wonder desperately how I could ever pay him back. And now I have let him die, far from me. I see it only too well, I did not love him sufficiently."

Again his feelings got the better of him, but after a short silence he continued: "And later, what wonderful days we two spent together! We used to wander about the countryside, hand in hand.

I recall one morning when we were down by the willows, fishing for crayfish, he said: 'Guillaume, in this world the only thing that really matters is friendship. Let's stick to each other, it will serve us well some day.' The dear fellow! Now he has gone from us, he is no more, and I am an orphan. But he will always live in me, I have lost my brother. . . . Now, Madeleine, I have only you."

He sobbed again, then, with a supreme movement of resignation, held out both hands to her.

She was in torment. Guillaume's sorrow and poignant self-reproach awakened in her a strange desire to resist. She could not hear these passionate words of praise for Jacques without wanting to cry: "Silence! That man stole your happiness, you owe him nothing." This was the last straw, to be confronted with her past by the very man whose love demanded her oblivion of what had been. Yet she dared not seal his lips by telling him everything, for she was terrified by what she had now learned, by these powerful bonds of friendship and gratitude which had linked her two lovers. She listened to Guillaume's despair as she would have heard the menacing rumble of a tidal wave surging on to engulf her. Her only emotion now was one of rage. Jacques' death exasperated her. First, she had felt a dull pain of loss, but then when she found that still that man was not dead in her heart, came revolt. By what right, being bodily dead, did Jacques Berthier now come to destroy her peace of mind?

Gillaume's arms were still stretched out towards her.

"My poor darling," he cried. "Do console me. . . . Now I have only you left in the world.

She was to console him for Jacques' death? That seemed to her both ludicrous and cruel. But she had no other course than to take him in her arms again and wipe the tears away once more as he wept for her first lover. The strange part she was now playing would have made her weep too, had there been tears within her. But she was implacable and hard. No regrets, not a hint of softness for the man she had once loved, nothing but an inward exasperation that Guillaume should be so upset about him. She was in this moment reduced to the daughter of Férat the smith.

"He loved him more than he does me," was her thought. "He would spurn me if I admitted what is in my heart."

Then, just to say something, and prompted by burning curiosity, she drily asked what Jacques had died of.

Guillaume now told her how while he was waiting to see his bank

manager he had mechanically picked up a newspaper, and his eyes had lit on a news item about the loss of the frigate *Prophet*, caught in a gale off the Cape of Good Hope. The ship had broken her back on a reef, and gone down with all on board. Jacques, who had set out for far-off Cochin-China, would not even rest in a tomb where one could some day offer a prayer. The news was official.

When the lovers' emotions had somewhat calmed, during the ensuing night, Madeleine was able to reflect more calmly on the unexpected happenings of the day. Her anger had dispersed, she felt only depressed and sad. Had she learned of Jacques' death in any other way, she would almost certainly have felt pangs of sorrow and have wept. Now, awake alone in the night with Guillaume breathing irregularly at her side, in the troubled sleep of those who grieve, her mind turned to the dead man, to the corpse washed by the waves and battered against the rocks. Perhaps, as he fell into the sea, her name had come to his lips. She recalled that one day in Soufflot Street, when he cut himself rather badly, she had all but fainted at the sight of the blood streaming over his fingers. She had loved him then and would have watched by his bedside for months, had he fallen ill. And now here he was, meeting death by drowning, and she was angry with him. He could surely not have become such a stranger to her. No, indeed, on the contrary, she felt him still there, in her bosom, in every limb, too, possessed by him so intimately that she seemed to feel his very breath on her body. Then there came that great spasm which used to take possession of her whenever he knotted his arms about her and she felt an inexpressible shock, as if a portion of her very flesh had been torn from her body. She began to cry, and hid her face in the pillow, so that Guillaume should not hear her. All her womanly weakness had come back to her, and she felt that she was now even more lonely than before in this world.

These pangs of hers lasted a long time. Involuntarily, she prolonged them, by recalling those days when Jacques was so loving to her, and with every fresh detail which came back to her she felt more miserable still, and could not forgive herself for her irritated indifference earlier in the day. Had Guillaume known her story, he would surely have made her kneel beside him, to weep together with him. She clasped her hands and, calling him back into being with such vividness that she felt she could hear his death cries amid the clamour of the wild seas, begged the man who was no more to forgive her.

A fierce desire suddenly took possession of her, and she no longer struggled against what had become an irresistible longing. She got up softly, with infinite precaution, so as not to waken Guillaume. When her feet touched the rug, she turned with anxiety to watch him, afraid lest he should want to know where she was going. But he slept on, his eyes still wet with tears. Then she took the night-light and went into the drawing-room, all anxiety when the floorboards creaked under her bare feet.

She went straight to the album, put it on a stool and opened it, and sat down to examine Jacques' portrait. This was what she had come for. Her shoulders covered with her unfastened auburn hair, she huddled shivering in her long nightgown and for a long time examined that portrait in the flickering yellow light of the night-light. Intense silence folded all round her, and when, assailed by sudden pointless fears, she held her head back and listened, the only sound she could catch was that of Guillaume's feverish breathing coming from the darkness of the other room.

Jacques in the photograph now no longer seemed to have that mocking look. Nor did the unfastened shirt, laying bare his chest, or the rolled-up sleeves, any longer stir memories. He was dead now, and his features had assumed an indefinable expression of sentimental affection. She found great peace of mind in thus contemplating him. He smiled out at her with the kindly smile of days now past and even his carefree posture did not disturb her very much. And this young man with his clay pipe, straddling the arm of a chair, seemed goodnaturedly forgiving about it all. This was the Jacques she had known, and death had brought out all his good nature. There he was, just as she had so often seen him, pushing open the door of their room, redeeming the shallowness of his love by his gaiety and good humour.

She wept gentler tears now and forgot herself for a while in the contemplation of this man who no longer existed. From now on, the portrait could be a cherished possession and she felt she had no reason to fear it. Then her morning struggles and her indecision, her burning need to be definite, all came back to her, and it seemed as if, in answer to her horror at seeing him rise between her and Guillaume, Jacques had brought her the news of his death, so she might live in peace. Never again would he come to disturb her in her new love. He seemed thus to authorize her to bury for ever the secret of their love in the depths of her heart. What good would be done by agonizing Guillaume? Why not now try to regain her own

happiness? It was her duty for reasons of charity and affection to hold her tongue. Jacques' portrait whispered: "All right, my pet, try to be a happy girl. I am no longer in this world, I shall never confront you, to be your living shame. Your lover is a child, I was once his succour, now you be it. If you want to be very kind, you can afford me a thought, now and then."

Madeleine's mind was made up. She would keep it all to herself, she would not be crueller than the fate which had chosen to conceal from Guillaume the name of her first lover. Besides—had he not said it himself?—he bore Jacques' memory in his heart, and that memory must remain unsullied, beyond reproach. If she confessed, it would be ruined for ever, and it would be evil of her to speak. And when she swore to herself never to say a word, she had the impression that the portrait thanked her, and she kissed it.

Day was breaking when she went back to bed. Guillaume was so broken that he was still sleeping, and in the end she too sank back into a peaceful drowsiness, cradled in distant hope. They would both forget this tortured day they had passed and once again would know the peace and mutual tenderness so dear to them.

Their dream, however, was over. The tranquillity of their early days were never again to lull them to rest in that nook in Boulogne Street. In the days which followed, the wretched ghost of the drowned man haunted the little house and wrapped them in lugubrious gloom. They forgot to kiss, spending whole mornings side by side, almost without speaking, each wrapped in sad memories. Jacques' death had brought a sort of icy breath into their snug isolation and they were all shivers, as if those cosy little rooms in which only yesterday they had spent their time in each other's laps were now dilapidated, barn-like halls, open to all the winds. The silence and shade which they had sought so ardently now brought vague feelings of fear. They were too much alone. One day, Guillaume could not withhold a cruel thought.

"This house," he said, "really feels like a tomb. It stifles me."

He was at once sorry for what he had said. Taking her hand, he begged her to forgive him.

"I will forget it, I shall get better," he said.

He really meant it. He did not know that one rarely dreams the same dream twice. When they emerged from their sense of disaster, the blind confidence they had known before was no more. Madeleine was the more changed. She came back to life a different woman. Having thus revived the past in her heart, she was no longer able

to forget herself blissfully in Guillaume's arms. Life had wounded her and would do so again, and she told herself that she would have to be constantly on her guard against the wounds which threatened. Previously she had scarcely given a thought to the disgrace which the term "mistress" brought. She found it natural to be loved and herself to love in return, all smiles, oblivious of the world. But now her pride suffered, all her Soufflot Street anxieties came back to her, her lover became for her an enemy who was robbing her of her self-respect. It needed but a trifle for her to feel this house was really not hers by right. The day came when the thought that she was "a kept woman" came to her in all clarity and burned like a red-hot iron. She took refuge in one of the rooms and wept bitterly all by herself.

Guillaume often used to make her presents. He loved giving. In the early days she had accepted those presents with all the delight of a child receiving new toys. The value of the thing was of no importance. She was happy to be her lover's constant thought. She accepted pieces of jewellery simply as mementoes. After the shock which awakened her from her dream, she was terribly upset to realize what silks and diamonds, for which she could never have paid herself, she was wearing. From then on she lived constantly embittered, and this luxury which was not hers wounded her. Her lace, her soft bed, and all the fittings of the little house hurt her. In all that surrounded her she saw the price of her shame.

"I am selling myself," she would sometimes tell herself, with a frightful pang at heart.

During those sad days Guillaume brought her a bracelet. When she saw the gewgaw, the blood left her cheeks and she was speechless. Astonished not to see her fling her arms round his neck as she had done previously, the young man gently asked: "Don't you like it, darling?"

But still at first she did not speak. Then, with uncertain voice, she said:

"My dearest, you are spending far too much on me. It's wrong of you. I do not need all these presents. I should love you just as much if you gave me nothing."

She choked back a sob. Guillaume, surprised and annoyed, drew her sharply to him. He was afraid to try to decipher the reason for her pallor.

"What is it?" he demanded. "Oh, Madeleine my sweet, what a horrid thought. . . . Are you not my wife?"

She looked him straight in the face. Her unflinching eyes, almost hard, clearly said:

"No, I am not your wife."

Had she dared, she would have suggested to her lover that she should be allowed to pay her board out of her little income, and pay for her dresses too. Ever since she had learned about Jacques, her pride had become rebellious. She felt hurt by everything, and this only served to make things so much worse.

Some days later, Guillaume brought her a frock, when with a hysterical little laugh she said:

"Thank you very much. But in future do let me buy things like that myself. You don't know what you're buying, they cheat you."

From then on, she bought all her own clothes. When her lover once wanted to recoup her for something she had just spent, she resorted to play-acting to find a way of refusing his offer. Thus she was always on her guard, waging real battles to protect this pride which the merest trifle served to wound. The truth was, life at this house in Boulogne Street was becoming unbearable to her. She loved Guillaume, yet contrived to make herself so unhappy by these daily rebellions that very often she thought she no longer loved him, though this did not prevent her being aghast when her meditation led her logically to the thought that he might always desert her some day, just as Jacques had done. When it came to that, she wept for hours, wondering to what new shame she would then fall.

Guillaume saw clearly enough how red her eyes sometimes were from that secret weeping, and he guessed something of the cause of it too. He tried to be kind and make it up to her, by being still more affectionate, but despite himself he merely became more uneasy, more highly-strung with every day. Why did she cry so? Was she unhappy with him? Was she pining for some other lover? This last idea made him very unhappy. He too began to lose the confidence and blindness of love of the first period of their liaison. He found himself dwelling on that past of Madeleine's of which he knew nothing, and which he had not wanted to know, but of which now he could not help constantly thinking. Those smarting suspicions which had assailed him that evening when they went to Verrière came back to him now and gnawed at him. Those past years worried him, he peered anxiously at Madeleine in an effort to decipher some sort of admission in gesture or glance, and when he did get the impression that he had detected a thought in her which was alien to him, he went through tortures at not being able

to satisfy her. Now that she belonged to him, she ought to be his completely. He told himself that he loved her enough for his love to satisfy her. He never could permit her to be meditative and felt terribly hurt whenever she showed a moment of indifference. Often, when he was at her side, she failed to hear what he said, letting him run on while she stared vaguely before her, lost in dark thoughts. Then he would be silent, thinking himself misunderstood, and a flash of his peculiar pride would be almost enough to transform his love into scorn. "My heart was deceived," he would tell himself. "This woman is not worthy of me, she has had too much experience in life to be able to pay for my affection for her."

They never came to real quarrels, but maintained a state of tacit warfare. Nevertheless, the few bitter words which did sometimes pass were enough to leave them shattered and unhappy.

"Your eyes are red," for instance, said Guillaume. "What makes you hide away and cry?"

"I don't," she replied, "you are mistaken." And she tried to smile.

"Oh no, I'm not mistaken," he insisted. "Sometimes, in the night, I hear you. Are you unhappy with me?"

She shook her head, but with that same forced laugh and attitude of a woman persecuted. Then he took her hands, trying to warm them in his, but, when they remained chill and lifeless, let them fall at last and cried:

"I am a poor lover, that's the truth, isn't it? I haven't a notion how to make you love me. . . . There are lovers who are unforgettable."

A thrust like that hurt Madeleine terribly.

"That is cruel of you," she replied, bitterly. "I have no illusions about what I am, and that is why I cry. What else did you think it could be, Guillaume?"

He looked to the ground, while she went on, forcefully, "Perhaps it would be better for you to know my former life. At least, you would know where you were, and would stop thinking shameful things which have no bearing. . . . Shall I tell you everything?"

Most forcibly, he refused, clutching her to his bosom, begging her to forgive him. This scene was repeated a number of times, but never went any further, and within the hour they were always back in their previous state, with him selfishly miserable for not having the whole of her and her beset both by the self-reproaches of her own pride and the fear of being hurt.

There were other occasions, when Madeleine clung to Guillaume's neck and wept freely. These fits of weeping, which had no obvious reason, were still more painful for the young man. He dared not interrogate his mistress, but tried to console her, but so tetchily that though he stopped her tears he would force her into an attitude of stubborn hardness, in which she would refuse to answer his questions, till he got so worked up that he too would begin to cry, when at last they would clasp each other in an embrace of mingled despair and mutual consolation. Nor could they have told one what made them unhappy. They were mortally unhappy without a notion why. They felt as if they breathed unhappiness, or some slow, incessant disaster was crushing the life from them.

It was a situation from which there was no way out. What was needed was frankness, but Madeleine shrank from this and Guillaume was too weak. For a month they lived a terrible life.

Guillaume had had Jacques' portrait lavishly framed. It was hung in their bedroom, and constantly upset Madeleine. Whenever she prepared for bed, the dead man's eyes seemed to watch her as she climbed between the sheets. During the night, she felt he was in the room and she strove to keep her kisses silent so that he should not hear them. And when, morning come, she dressed, she made haste to hide her daylight nakedness from that portrait. Yet all the time she loved the picture, and the disturbance it caused her heart was in no way one of sorrow. Her memories had become memories of affection only, she never thought of Jacques now as if she were his mistress, he was merely a shameful friend of the past. The shame she felt, however, was more on Jacques's account than Guillaume's, and it was a physical suffering to see him present when she and Guillaume lay clasped to each other. There were moments when she felt she should ask his forgiveness, and then would stand dreamily facing the portrait, with no other feeling in her but one of immense relief. And whenever she had one of her bouts of weeping or a spiteful exchange with Guillaume occurred, she would look at Jacques with more affection than ever. Forgetful of her old sufferings, in a very vague way she longed to have him back.

Possibly in the end Madeleine would have come to weeping before the portrait, like any other inconsolable widow, had a further event in their lives not suddenly drawn both her and Guillaume out of the sad life they were leading. Another month, and they could hardly have failed to quarrel for ever and curse the very day they met. They were saved by external circumstance. There came a

letter from *Noiraude* summoning Guillaume there, at all speed. His father was on his death-bed. Greatly moved by Guillaume's grief, Madeleine clasped him tenderly to her, and for a whole hour they lived once again hand in hand, till, heart-broken, he set out on his journey home, telling her he would write to her and that she should wait for him.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Lord of the Manor of *Noiraude* was already dead—the truth had been hidden from Guillaume to soften the impact of the sad news.

The circumstances of this demise for a long time made the servants' quarters shudder. As was his wont, the Count had locked himself in his laboratory the previous day. Geneviève had been rather surprised when he did not come down that evening, but he did sometimes work late, taking up something to eat for himself, and the old housekeeper did not bother him about dinner. During the evening, however, she had a presentiment that something was wrong, for the laboratory window, which as a rule glowed in the night like a mouth of hell, remained dark.

The next morning Geneviève was really worried, so she went up to listen at the door. Not a sound, not a breath. Scared now, she called out, and there was no answer. It was only then that she noticed that the door had merely been pulled to, not locked, a detail which finally alarmed her, for her master never failed to double-lock himself in.

She entered. De Viargue lay stretched out on his back in the middle of the room. His legs were stiff, his arms flung out, but convulsed. The features were distorted in a horrible leer, the skin blotched with livid patches, the head drawn back, revealing the throat, over which too ran long yellowish strips of discoloration. Apparently, the Count had fallen, his skull crashing on the boards. A thin stream of blood had run under the stove, there to make a little pool. Death throes had apparently been over in a matter of seconds.

Geneviève cried out and started back from the corpse. Her back to the wall, the old woman mumbled a chaotic prayer. What terrified her particularly were those patches of discoloration on the neck. They looked like bruises: it must have been Satan who had at long last come to strangle her master, there indeed were the marks of his fingers to prove it. For a long time she had been expecting this. Whenever she had seen the Count locking himself in, she had muttered: "There he goes again, summoning the Devil

to serve him, but Satan will get him in the end. One of these nights, he'll get him by the throat and snatch his soul in no time." Here was her prophecy come true, and the old woman shook all over as she thought of the frightful struggle which must have caused her heretic master's death. Her fierce imagination conjured up Satan, black and hairy, leaping at his victim's throat, tearing the soul from the body and vanishing up the chimney.

Geneviève's cry brought the servants, and they, all chosen carefully by de Viargue from among the most ignorant peasants of the district, were as convinced as she was that their master had perished in a fight with Satan. They carried him down from the attic and laid him on his bed, shaking with fear as they did so, fearful of seeing some monstrous creature emerge from the gaping, blackened mouth of that corpse. It was accepted for miles around that the Count de Viargue had been a wizard and that Satan had stolen him away.

The doctor who was called in to establish the death had a different explanation: from the discoloured patches he judged that there had been poisoning, and his scientific curiosity was particularly aroused by the strange nature of those yellowish blotches, for no poison that he knew of could have caused them. He decided, rightly, that the old scientist must have taken some quite new poison which he himself had discovered in his lengthy researches. But he was a prudent man. In the cause of science, he sketched the markings, but the secret of de Viargue's violent death he kept to himself. He put the cause down as a sudden stroke. He wanted to avoid the scandal which would certainly have arisen had he said that de Viargue had committed suicide. People are always concerned to protect the posthumous name of the rich and the powerful.

Guillaume arrived one hour before the burial. His grief was great. His father had always treated him coldly. Losing him, there was no question of feeling the break of any great affection. All the same, the poor young fellow was in such a state of mind that he sobbed copiously. After the troubled, painful days he had latterly been living through with Madeleine, the slightest sorrow could not but bring tears to his eyes. Two months previously he would very likely not have found a single sob.

When he came back from the funeral, Geneviève had him retire to his room, and there, with the calm cruelty of a fanatic, she declared that sacrilege had been committed by allowing his father to be buried in consecrated ground. Without sparing him, she

recounted the story of the death, which after her own fashion she attributed to the Devil. Perhaps she would not have told such details over the freshly covered grave had she not wished to point a moral. It was a sermon she gave the young man, leading up to a demand that he at least should never conclude a pact with Hell. Guillaume promised all she asked him to. Shaken as he was by his grief, he heard her to the end with a stupefied air, unable to grasp what all the talk of Satan was about, then as the shrill old voice told him how his father had fought the Devil, he felt he would go out of his mind. He listened without comment to what she told him about the markings on his father's dead body, and though it was a suggestion which he could not bring himself to accept, the colour left his cheeks in horror.

At this very moment he was informed that somebody wished to see him, and in the hall found the physician who had signed the death certificate. With great delicacy and much circumlocution this gentleman told him the unpleasant truth, adding that though he had thought himself justified in concealing the suicide from the world, he felt it his duty to tell the son everything. This revelation struck chill in Guillaume, but he thanked the doctor for having lied in this way. His tears, however, now dried up. He stared dully into the future. He had the impression of a bottomless abyss opening at his feet. Staggering like a man in drink, he was about to withdraw when the doctor asked him to wait a moment. For he had not come to *Noiraude*, as he alleged, merely to tell the truth. He had always been consumed by an irresistible longing to get into the Count's laboratory, and had realized that he would never have a finer opportunity, for now the son would let him in where the father had always kept the door rigorously closed.

"You must forgive me," he said to Guillaume, "if at a moment like this I bother you with such matters, but I am afraid that tomorrow it may be too late to examine certain things. That discoloration on your father's throat was so strange that I cannot imagine what poison it was that caused it. . . . I wonder whether you would allow me to have a look round the room where he was found? That might enable me to give you preciser information."

Guillaume asked for the laboratory key and went up there with the physician. For the moment, whatever this person had wanted to see, from stables to cellars, Guillaume would have taken him there without a hint of surprise, simply not knowing what he was doing. But when he entered the laboratory, the appearance of the

room so astonished him, that he was shocked out of his stupor. He could hardly recognize the long attic room. It had changed greatly. When he had been there, some three years previously, that day when his father forbade him either to take up any career or pursue private scientific studies, it had been in a condition of perfect cleanliness and order. The tiles of the stove were gleaming. The brass and glass of the instruments reflected the light which poured in through the large window panes. The walls had been lined with shelves piled with flasks, jars and test-tubes of all sorts, while the table in the centre was piled with large opened books and neat bundles of manuscript. He had still not forgotten the impression of respectful astonishment which the sight of that scientific researcher's workshop had produced in him, with all its wide range of objects, so methodically arranged. There, he had seen the accumulated fruits of a long life of work, the precious secrets of a man of science who for more than half a century had been probing into Nature, yet never consented to tell anyone the fruits of his burning curiosity. When Guillaume now entered the lab, he had of course expected to see everything still in place, instruments or equipment on the shelves, books and papers on the table, but he found complete disorder. A tempest might have scoured through the place, smashing it all and grinding it into the dust. Black with smoke, the furnace looked as if it had been dead for months. There was a heap of cold ashes which had spilled out on to the floor. The brass of the equipment was twisted, the glassware was cracked and broken. Those flasks and jars which had been ranged on the shelves were piled glittering in a corner, so much debris, like potsherds at the end of a deserted alley. Even the shelves were broken away, hanging loose, as if torn from their fastenings by the hand of a madman. As for the books and papers, these were all torn and half burned, making a heap in another corner. Nor did this devastation date merely from the previous day. The laboratory had long since been thus laid in waste, for festoons of cobweb dangled from the ceiling and there was a thick layer of dust over it all.

At sight of such disorder, Guillaume felt something stab at his heart, for he thought he understood. Years gone by, his father had spoken to him of those studies of his with sullen jealousy and bitter scorn. He must have come in the end to consider science a lascivious, cruel mistress, whose insatiable lust had broken him, and now, out of mingled passion for science and scorn for the crowd, he was not going to have her possessed by any other when he was gone. With

grieving heart the young man clearly pictured the day on which the old scientist had fallen into a final rage and destroyed his own laboratory. He could just imagine the Count's foot flying, as he kicked apparatus against the walls, grinding flasks into the floorboards, tearing down shelving, ripping up his notes and burning them. One hour or even less had been enough to destroy the research of a whole lifetime. At last, when not one of his discoveries or observations any longer existed, when he stood alone amid the ruins of his laboratory, he must have sat down, to wipe his brow and grin a strange and horrible grin.

What more than anything else froze Guillaume's heart was the thought of the terrible days that his father must have passed after that, buried in this room which had become the tomb of his whole life, of his work and his passion. For months after, he had still locked himself away there, just as he had done previously, but never touched a thing again, merely tramped up and down, lost in the void he thought to achieve for himself, treading fragments of his beloved instruments underfoot, scornfully kicking aside the debris of his manuscripts and sherds of flasks which still contained something of the substances he had analysed or discovered. Perhaps the work of destruction was not yet complete, perhaps he had missed this pot or that flask, perhaps there was some piece of apparatus which required yet another kick. What supreme scorn it must have been, what bitter mockery, in the long hours which followed, hours in supreme inactivity, meditating on his own wilful destruction of all that he had done.

Nothing seemed to have been left. Yet, when Guillaume went through the mess which filled the room, he did in the end come upon one piece of furniture which his father's hand seemed to have respected. This was a sort of wall cupboard, a small cabinet, with shelves and glazed doors. It was full of bottles of liquids of various colours. Here the Count, one of whose great interests had been toxicology, had locked away powerful new poisons of his own discovery. The cabinet had been taken from one of the ground-floor sitting-rooms, where Guillaume recalled often having noticed it in his boyhood. Brass-bound, it was of mahogany, with fine inlaid work in the end panels, a collector's piece which would not have disgraced any lady's boudoir. De Viargue had scrawled—obviously with his finger, dipping it in the ink—in big black letters, the one word: *Poisons*.

The biting sarcasm of this preservation by his father of a cabinet

of poisons and one other object, a knife, pained Guillaume in the extreme. To think that his father's whole life and all his knowledge should have culminated in a few bottles of new poisons. His other discoveries, those which might have been useful, he had destroyed, and of all his extensive research and the workings of his powerful intellect, he had left to humanity merely these instruments of suffering and death. This insult to knowledge, this grim mockery, this scorn for his fellow-men, this supreme declaration of mortification, were eloquent of the death-throes of this man whose only acquisition, after fifty years research, seemed to have been the drops of poison collected in a retort, which he had administered to himself.

Guillaume withdrew to the door. Horror and repulsion drove him away from this place. With all that dirt, that clutter of indescribable litter, laced with spiders' webs, and deep in dust, the laboratory exuded a foetidity which choked him. The ugly heaps of broken glass, the crumpled, charred paper littering every corner, all seemed like the excrement of this science against which his father had warned him, and which, before ending his life, he had contemptuously brushed aside, like a man turning out of his house a foul whore while his scorn is still clouded with an ardent desire for her. And when he looked up again at that poison cabinet, he even seemed to catch the old chemist's sad laughter, for months before the event meditating on his suicide. And then, with a shudder, in the centre of the laboratory he saw the thin line of blood that had oozed from his father's skull, to trickle under the stove. Drying, it had flaked away from the boards.

All this time the doctor was poking about. It had been obvious to him, the moment he stood on the threshold, what had taken place, and the sight sent him into a rage.

"What a man, what a man!" he muttered. "He has destroyed it all, ruined it all. . . . Oh, if only I had been about, I would have put a rope round him, as a lunatic."

He turned to Guillaume.

"Your father was a very clever man," he said. "He must have made valuable discoveries. But see what he has done with them! It was insanity, pure insanity. . . . Do you understand what I say? A scientist who would have been a worthy member of the French Institute, choosing to keep all his work to himself. . . . Even now, if I could only dig one of his papers out of this pile, I could publish it, and that would be to our honour, yours and mine."

Regardless of the dust, he rummaged among the debris, then

cried: "Nothing, not a single page intact! Never in my life did I see greater lunacy!"

From the pile of paper, he turned to the heap of sherds, constantly crying out with disappointment. He sniffed at the bottoms of broken flasks, in an attempt to discover the dead man's secrets. At last, furious at being unable to learn a thing, he came back to the centre of the room. It was only then that the wall cupboard caught his eye. With a cry of delight he ran to it. But the key was missing, and all he could do was peer at the bottles through the glass panes. Then, gravely, he turned to Guillaume.

"I beg you," he said, fervently, "I beg you, do give me a chance to analyse these substances. . . . I put it to you in the name of science, indeed, in memory of your late father."

But Guillaume shook his head. Pointing to the debris all round them, he said: "You see for yourself what my father's wish was—to leave no trace of his work. No, those bottles must remain exactly as they are."

The doctor tried to argue, but he was unable to shake Guillaume's resolution. More exasperated than ever, he began again to poke about in the laboratory. Reaching the bloodstains, he stopped short and enquired if this was the Count's blood. When Guillaume told him that it was, his features seemed to light up. Kneeling down by the stove, with his finger-nails he gingerly tried to detach some flakes from the half-dried pool. By fine analysis of this, he might be able to unearth what poison the Count had used against himself. But when Guillaume grasped what he was about, he rushed across the room to him, his lips quivering, and took him by the arm.

"Come, Doctor," he cried, firmly. "Can't you see, this place suffocates me. . . . We ought not disturb the peace of those who are gone. Let the blood be. I insist."

With bad grace, the doctor left the flaked blood on the floor. Urged now by the young man, he left the laboratory, though under protest. Only when they were both outside, in the corridor, could Guillaume breathe freely. He locked the door, to keep the oath he had made his father. He would never set foot in that room.

When he came down, in the ground-floor sitting-room he found a Véteuil magistrate, who, however, courteously informed him that he had come to seal the late Count's papers, unless of course he could be given a proper will. He was even tactful enough to point out to Guillaume that he knew his real relationship to the Count and his position as adopted son, so of course he really had no doubts

but that somewhere there was a will leaving everything to him. This little speech he wound up by an ingratiating smirk, and the suggestion that no doubt the will was tucked away somewhere in a drawer, but the law was the law, there might be special legacies, and Guillaume would have to be patient. Guillaume at once closed the fellow's lips by presenting him with the will, which made him the sole legatee. De Viargue had been obliged to wait till his son came of legal age before adopting him and legally giving him his name, and it was only then, since the act of adoption involved the necessity of some settlement, that he had been allowed to treat the boy born out of wedlock as his legitimate son. Smothering himself with apologies, the magistrate repeated that the law was the law, then hastily withdrew, taking good care to give Guillaume his new title, not address him merely as "sir", as he had been doing a few minutes earlier, despite the fact that he knew very well that Guillaume in any case had the right as adopted son to assume the title.

For the next few days, Guillaume was overwhelmed with preoccupations. He was not given a moment to consider his new position. From all round he was snowed under with expressions of regret, requests and offers of service. In the end, he shut himself away in his own room, leaving instructions with Geneviève to answer the crowds of people pestering him. He unloaded all his cares on her. In his will, the Count had left the old lady an income sufficient to end her days in reasonable comfort, but she was almost annoyed at this, refusing the money, insisting that she would die on her feet and had no intention of giving up working. Secretly, the young man was very glad to find somebody to take over his material cares. Sluggish and weak, his mind hated having to do things. The slightest daily care was capable of frustrating him with sullen anger and abhorrence.

When at last he could resume his hermit-like life, a great sadness came over him. He was no longer sustained by excitement, and felt a gloomy depression weighing him down. For some days now he had contrived to forget his father's self-murder. Now it all came back to him again, and from morning to night his mind dwelt again on that ravaged laboratory with the blood-stain on the floor, and in its wake, one by one, that sinister upper room dragged the harsh memories of his life. This latest tragedy seemed to be merely another in the long series of evils which had already made a misery of his life. With pangs he recalled the dubious circumstances of his birth, then his highly-strung, terrorized childhood, a martyr's life,

his very existence given over to sorrow. The horrors of his father's violent death and the sarcastic twist of the old man's rejection of his life work were the last straw. All these distressing details were really more than his gentle soul, set in its highly-strung body, could bear. Nothing seemed to spare his sensitivities, and he was utterly dismayed in his craving for love and peace. This heavy atmosphere of misfortune which he had breathed from the cradle up began to stifle him. He shrank more than ever into himself, became more timorous and more feeble than ever in proportion to the blows that fate levelled at him, till at last he became convinced that he was doomed to be a victim of fate for ever, and was ready for any wild act, could he but thereby purchase the sombre peace of oblivion. The thought that he had now become the owner of the de Viargue fortune, which meant that it was up to him to begin to act like an adult, merely augmented all his wavering and his apprehensions. Utterly ignorant of worldly matters, he was fearsome about the future, the question uppermost in his mind being: what new wounds would life bring him? During his bouts of meditation, he had a vague feeling that as soon as he ventured to move, his reactions and the circumstances amid which he had grown up, were together bound to drive him into some new pit.

He considered himself a very unfortunate person indeed. This however doubled the strength of his love for Madeleine, and he began to dream of her again with a sort of religious fixity. She alone, he told himself, knew his worth and loved him for what he really was. Yet, had one probed deeper, it would have been to find lurking in him a secret fear of this bond of his with a woman whose past was unknown to him. He would in the last resort have admitted that this was merely another of those tricks of fate of which his life was full, another result of the circumstances by which he had been shaped. Indeed, when he recalled his own mother's story, he was even on the verge of withdrawing from his liaison, but so great was his need to be loved by somebody that, eyes shut, he plunged back into a love life with the only person still capable of affording him a few months of affection and peace. He wrote Madeleine long letters daily, bemoaning his isolation, swearing that their separation would soon be over. There was even a moment when he made up his mind to go and shut himself away once again with his mistress in that little detached *maisonette* in Boulogne Street. Then he remembered what frightful days he had recently known there, and he felt afraid he would never recover their early happiness in that place.

The next day he wrote to Madeleine to ask her without delay to join him at *Noiraude*.

Madeleine was delighted with this move. She too was afraid of the loneliness of the Paris house, full as it was with memories of Jacques. She had spent a whole fortnight alone there, getting desperately anxious. The first evening, she had put away that portrait whose dead owner still possessed her. Had she kept it under her eyes in the bedroom now that she was alone, she would have felt every night she was giving herself into the arms of a ghost. She even had moments of real rage against Guillaume for leaving her like that in this house inhabited by her former lover. When she finally locked the door of that house behind her, she felt a surge of delight. It was as if she had locked Jacques' ghost in it.

Guillaume met her at Mantes. When they had walked only a few paces from the station, he outlined to her the scheme of the new life which he proposed for them. She was to come down to that part of the world as if she wanted to live quietly in the country, and he would make a pretence of renting her the lodge on the far side of the park. There, he could see her at will. But at this Madeleine tossed her head. She found it most distasteful once again to be kept by her lover, and she tried to find good reasons for rejecting the hospitality he offered. She said that in the end they would be less at liberty if they both lived more or less in the same house, for this would make tongues wag and it would be far better for him to agree to her taking a small house on her own in the neighbourhood of the estate. Guillaume saw the wisdom of these considerations, for he at once thought of the scandal which the affair between his own father and mother had caused in those parts. So in the end they agreed that he was to drive back alone in his gig, while she took the coach and came to Véteuil as a complete stranger. As soon as she had found somewhere to live, she would get in touch with him.

She was fortunate enough to find what she wanted at once. About three-quarters of a mile from *Noiraude* the proprietor of the inn at which she put up had a sort of farm, at which, now to his great regret, he had had a towny sort of little dwelling-house built, for he scarcely ever used the cottage, and lamented all the money he had spent on it. When, the very evening she arrived, Madeleine spoke of wishing to spend the summer in the neighbourhood, provided she could find the right house, he offered to rent this place of his. The next morning he took her out there. The place was quite small, two up and two down, with offices, and the past

winter's rains had hardly stained the white walls, against which the grey shutters were hooked back. Amid the trees, the red tiles of the roof were very chcerful, and there was a high hedge round a tiny garden. Within gunshot of this were the farm buildings, a huddle of low, dingy, tar-washed sheds from which came the cries of a rooster and the bleating of sheep. It was a real find and Madeleine was enchanted, the more so since the house was to be let completely furnished, so she could move in at once. She agreed to a rental of five hundred francs for the season, feeling that this would still leave her enough for her living expenses, and she was there that evening, humming gaily as she unpacked, feeling she wanted to leap about and sing like a child. From the first instant when she caught sight of that little place with its red roof, grey shutters, and smiling white walls set amid green foliage, she told herself that, tucked away like this, deep in the country, she really was going to be happy.

Towards nine that evening, Guillaume called—she had written him a note that morning—and like a delighted child she did him the honours of her house, showing him all over it, not leaving out a single cupboard. He even had to go round the garden, though it was a pitch dark night.

"Why," she said, with an air of pride, "I've even got my own raspberries. And here's a clump of violets. And I think I saw some radishes growing over here."

Guillaume could make out nothing, but he held her tight in the darkness, kissed her bare arms, laughed when she laughed. At the far end of the garden, she suddenly said, very solemnly: "Here, my dear sir, there is a big hole in the hedge, and that is where you are to come in every day. I will not have you compromising me by using the gate." And she really insisted on his trying to get through. It was a long time since the lovers had tasted such lovely moments

Madeleine had not been mistaken, she was bound to be happy in this secluded place. She felt a new love burgeon in her heart, the laughing, untrammelled love of a schoolchild. Jacques' portrait was buried away in that house in Paris, where she had locked it, together with all the painful memories of the years gone by. There were moments now when she felt as if she were fresh from school, so lightly came her laughter, so carefree was her mind. What delighted her was at last having her own place. She would say "My house" and "My bedroom" with the delight of a child. She did for herself, she worked out what her meals cost her, she got

worried when eggs or butter went up. Guillaume never pleased her more than he did when he accepted her invitations to dinner. On those days he was even forbidden to bring fruit from *Noiraude*, she insisted on finding everything herself, she was overjoyed to have stopped always being the recipient, able instead to give him things. From now on, she could love him on an equal footing, her affections were free. The shameful notion that she was a kept woman never again hurt her pride, her heart could expand freely, there were no more of those heart-pangs at sudden thought of her equivocal position. When Guillaume came in, she flung her arms round his neck and her smile, the light in her eyes, the frank way she gave herself, all cried: "I am doing this freely, I am not selling myself."

Herein lay the explanation of the new warmth of love between these two. Guillaume now had all the surprise and enchantment of finding in Madeleine a woman he had never known before. Till now, she had been his mistress. Now she was his dear love. For hitherto he had loved her in his own setting, now he went to her, to love her in her house, and this distinction proved decisive for their love. Though he did not realize it, he was not so free in the little house near *Noiraude* as he had been in the Paris maisonette. He did not feel he was the master, hence he was more grateful for the caresses which Madeleine permitted him. There was less crudity in their passion, for he felt a sense of embarrassment which was delightful and by giving their embraces new charm and delicacy augmented his enjoyment. Elevated thus to love mingled with new esteem, his heart now found great delight in the overtones of their new circumstances. He found pleasure in thus entering a woman's own house, in the role of the lover freely chosen, and he began to find the cottage imbued with the exquisite and the gracious in a way he had never known before, so that he found here a warmth which he had never breathed in his own mansion. To crown all, there was that necessity to smuggle himself in unobserved, from fear of mischievous tongues. He made his way there across country, tramping fresh-ploughed furrows, striding through the rain-wet meadow grass, and was happy as a truant schoolboy. If he thought he had been noticed, he pretended to be botanizing, plucking flowers and other herbs, and only when he had a bunch of specimens would he resume his way, anxious and out of breath, but already enjoying the delights to come. And when he got there, and had slipped like a thief through the thorny hedge, he would toss his

bunch of flowers at Madeleine who was waiting for him, as she hurried him indoors, there at last, hidden from curious eyes, to offer him her cheeks and her lips. This ritual cross-country approach, followed by her welcoming kiss, delighted him more every time he tried it. Had it all been easier, perhaps he would have tired of it the sooner.

Once they were safely esconced in the house, Guillaume found particular delight in reminding himself that not a soul knew about them. Every visit was a wonderful escapade to him, a *rendez-vous* granted by the most circumspect of débutantes. Those months they had lived together in Paris were completely forgotten. For that matter, Madeleine too was a new person, no longer given to fits of brooding, but, fully alert, and loving Guillaume too, loving him covertly, like any lady of society who has appearances to keep up, so that whenever she admitted him to her bedroom she could never quite suppress her blushes. He was, moreover, a persistent visitor there, its special scents stirring him to the core every time. There was not a thing in this room that was his, not even a pair of slippers.

This delightful existence continued throughout the summer, the days flitting by in blissful tranquillity, and with their mutual lovers' alliance these two now recompensed each other for their mutual delight—just as previously they had nearly broken off for ever when aware that they were making one another mutually unhappy.

Madeleine had taken the cottage towards mid-April. All she knew of the country was what she had seen on a few trips into the Paris suburbs, and living like this for a whole season, right out in the fields, was a tremendous delight, and a healthy one too. She saw all the trees blossom, then set and ripen their fruit, and with radiant astonishment she followed the labour of mother earth. When she had first come here, the leaves were delicate things of bright pale green and, still moist from the winter rains, with all the innocent charm of a babe, that level country was just beginning to stir under the first rays of the spring sun. From the pale, distant lines of the horizon a breath which was fresh and virginal entered her soul. Then the heavens' caresses grew more ardent, the foliage darkened, the earth grew to womanhood, the soil knew love and in that impregnation its bowels trembled. There followed the tremendous lust of birth. Likewise, refreshened and soothed by the warm airs of springtide, Madeleine felt herself impregnated with vitality by the fierceness of summer, her veins powerful and steady, throbbing with the heat of it. Thus the sun of high summer gave her both

peace and strength. She was like a shrub which had been cut back by a winter frost, but was now shooting again, restored to renewed childhood in the spring, to grow anew and spread wide the magnificence of its leaves.

She began to need the open air and love the free skies, going for long walks which were her great delight. She was out nearly every day, tramping for miles, and never feeling over-tired. She used to arrange to meet Guillaume in a little wood through which flowed that river in which her sweetheart had once set lines for crayfish. Meeting, they would stroll slowly over the soft greensward, concealed by the trees on either bank, and follow up the valley, with its ceiling of leaves and air vibrant with freshness, at their feet the river, a silver ribbon undulating soundless over its sandy bed. Here and there were little rapids, where the tinkle of the rippling water was like rustic pipes. And on both sides rose tall trees, their trunks moss and ivy covered, set rock-firm like stone pillars. Interlaced between these were brambles, forming ramparts of green which walled in the ride, turning it into an endless street of foliage. Overhead, the vault was thick with wrens, noisy like clouds of flies. Here and there the branches broke apart, revealing a corner of blue sky beyond all the greenery. Guillaume and Madeleine loved this narrow close-confined little wilderness, a natural cradle to which they never did find an end. For hours they followed the river's winding course, oblivious of all things beyond. The fresh breath of the cool waters and the stillness of the trees filled them with exquisite delight. Arms laced about each other's waists, they pressed close, wherever the shadows grew dense. Sometimes they played like children, chasing each other about, getting caught on brambles, tripping up in the tangled grasses. All at once, Madeleine would vanish, hiding behind a thicket while her lover, who could perfectly well make out the edge of her bright-coloured skirts, pretended with anxious air to look for her, then, with one bound, seized her and overturned her on the sward, holding her there, laughing wildly, close in his arms.

Another time, Madeleine would tell him she felt cold, and wanted to walk in the sun, for the shade in the end always weighed heavy on this vigorous character. They strolled in the powerful July sunshine. They would part the wall of brambles and make their way through, to follow along vast fields of wheat, the pale waves of which, drowsy under the midday sky, lay outstretched as far as the eye could see. The air was scorching, but through this furnace heat

Madeleine strode lightly, luxuriating in the sun as it stung her throat and bare arms. A trifle pallid, on her forehead tiny beads of sweat, she let the fierce orb have all its way with her. This, she said, restored her energy when she felt tired, under the crushing weight of that flaming sky she felt it easier to live, her powerful shoulders bore it easily. But Guillaume suffered from the heat. The moment she saw him out of breath, she would draw him back again into the shady avenue, beside the cool, translucid waters.

Thus they would continue their sentimental stroll, finding new enchantment in the silence and coolness which so recently they had left. In this wise, they reached a sort of rotunda, where as a rule they paused to rest. Here the avenue broadened and the river formed a tiny lake with surface like polished steel, the outlines of the trees shaping an amphitheatre, beyond which they saw the blue sky. It was like a hall of greenery. The stretch of still water was bordered by tall, swaying reeds. Beyond these was a carpet of grass, reaching from the mere to the foot of the trees, there to disappear in the tall brushwood which enclosed this clearing with an impenetrable wall. But the delight of this secluded spot, both wild and gentle, was a water-spring which rose behind a rock. The huge mass of the stone, its crest covered with brambles dangling down, overhung the water a little, falling away into bluish shadow. The fine thread of water of the spring emerged with all the grace of a serpent leaping from the heart of this grotto, which was full of climbing plants, its walls dripping with moisture. Guillaume and Madeleine would seat themselves there, and listen to the regular beat of the dripping of water from the roof of the caves and in that sound they found an endless lullaby, a vague sense of sleep and of eternity which flattered their joyous love-making. Thus, little by little, they would fall into silence and be overcome by the monotony of that endless song of the dripping water, feeling that they were listening to the beat of their own hearts as, dreaming, hand in hand, they smiled at one another.

Madeleine always brought fruit with her, and, emerging at last from her reverie, would plunge her lovely teeth into the juicy flesh and hold a peach or a pear to her lover's lips, for him too to bite. Guillaume was filled with wonder at the sight of her. Every day, she seemed more dazzlingly beautiful to him. With astonishment, he followed the blossoming of health and strength in her, in the open air life she led, and marvelled at her. Country life was indeed making a new woman of her. She seemed even to have grown taller.

Healthy, full of vitality, well built, she had turned into a powerful, full-bosomed young woman, with clarion laughter, though her skin, now slightly tanned, never lost its lovely transparency. Loosely knotted, her auburn hair tumbled over her shoulders in a dense blaze of colour. She was the personification of superb energy.

Guillaume never tired of watching this picture of feminine beauty and health, this girl whose tranquil, powerful kisses constantly calmed his own fits of fever. He felt a supreme serenity developing in her. She had regained her will-power, she lived free from shocks, giving ear solely to the inborn directness of her being. This lonely life and full sunlight suited her, she was expanding in both charm and power, turning into the woman that satisfaction of her need for respect and peace could always have made of her. In those long dallyings at *The Spring*, as they had christened their retreat, Guillaume would gaze down at Madeleine as she lay stretched out on the grass, her hair shedding a fiery glow over her throat, and would follow the firm outline of her limbs revealed by the thin frock she wore. At times he would take her up in his arms to crush her to him, in sudden pride of possession, though never lustfully. Their loving was invariably calm and healthy.

Days when the lovers did not go to *The Spring*, they drove out a few miles in the gig then, leaving this at an inn, wandered aimlessly through the countryside, their only rule being always to take the narrower of two paths, that most likely to lead them into the unknown. When they had tramped a long time, with hedgerows beset with apple-trees on either side, without meeting a soul, they felt as happy as poachers escaping the eye of the gamekeeper. These vast stretches of Normandy's level, rich countryside, never-changing, seemed all to reflect their own unruffled love. They never tired of seeing the same skyline of mingled meadow and arable. Many a time they lost their way, and then they would make for the nearest farmstead. Madeleine loved the animals. A brood of chicks pecking all round their clucking, feather-puffing mother could make them laugh the whole afternoon. She went into the cow-byres to stroke the cows. The gambolling kids delighted her. She was attracted by all this world of the farmyard and craved for poultry of her own, with ducks, pigeons too, and geese, and had Guillaume's smiles not restrained her, would never have gone home without some creature tucked in her skirt. She had another weakness—for children. The moment she saw a young urchin sprawling in a farmyard, perhaps up on the muck-heap with the poultry, she

would stand and stare, speechless, rather pensive, smiling a little sadly, then, as if drawn by a magnet, would go close and take the kid up in her arms, without a thought of the mud or the jam with which it was besmeared. She would then insist on getting a glass of milk to drink, and would cling to the little one till she had got her beverage, dandling the child and crying out to Guillaume to admire "the treasure's" lovely big eyes. When she had finished her milk, she would go away rather sadly, with regretful backward glances.

Autumn came. Sombre clouds swept low over the skies, driven by icy winds, and the countryside began to sink to sleep. The lovers thought they would pay one last visit to *The Spring*, but they found their retreat in very poor state. The greensward was covered with a rain of yellowed leaves, the green walls were broken down, the rotunda was now open to all the winds of heaven, and consisted solely of the bony trunks of the trees, the high branches of which held out their nudity against the grey sky. The little lake and the spring too were tarnished, muddied by recent storms. Guillaume saw that winter was nigh, and their walks must end. As he gazed at Madeleine, the death of the summer filled him with sad thoughts, while she, seated opposite him, broke sear fragments of brushwood into small pieces and tossed the fragments all about her.

Since the previous day, it had been in Guillaume's mind to propose marriage to his mistress. This idea of marrying her now, without delay, had come to him at a farm while he watched Madeleine petting one of the children there, a little one whom she adored. It occurred to him suddenly that if she conceived, he would have a bastard for son. Memories of his own childhood invariably filled him with horror at the mere mention of bastardy. Besides, everything now pointed to their marriage. As he had said years since to Jacques, he would have to love one woman and one only, the first he met, and would have to love her with his whole being and stick to that love, out of a loathing for change and terror of the unknown. He had fallen asleep in Madeleine's affections. Now that he was snug and comfortable in that love, he thought he should stay there for ever. His slow mind and his gentle spirit both liked to think that they had found a refuge for life. Marrying Madeleine would merely legitimize a union which he already regarded as eternal.

The sudden thought that he might have a son merely made him want to hasten the obvious end. Besides, winter was on the way, it

would be dismal for him, buried alone in his enormous, empty mansion, there could be no more of days like these, spent out-of-doors, or in that cottage, in the warm breath of his mistress. Throughout the long, icy months he would have to go coursing through the rain before he could knock at Madeleine's door. What snug delight, on the other hand, if they lived together. They could pass the inclement days at the fireside. Instead of shivering, they would spend a warm honeymoon in a snug alcove, well shut in, and never go out at all till the next spring, when they could return to the sunshine. In Guillaume's decision there was also the desire to love Madeleine in broad daylight, to afford her that outward sign, the esteem which he knew would be dear to her. He told himself he could be sure they would never suffer from their intimacy, would never hurt each other again, once they were tied to one another.

And yet there was still a dim sense of fear lurking deep in this plan with which Guillaume now played, and for a time it kept him restless and undecided. During the months of oblivion he had just passed he had never again fallen a victim to those terrors regarding the future which his father's suicide had awakened in him. The facts of that death no longer crushed him. After so many shocks, his life seemed to him a sovereign repose, an assuagement of all his pangs and all his fears. It was he now who lived in the present, in every minute of the day as it brought him new delight. But the moment that he gave thought to the morrow, the unknown concealed therein filled him with a dull feverishness. Was he perhaps, without knowing it, chary of an eternal tie with a woman whose past he did not know? Whatever the cause, he again became all worry, but his hesitation never found actual expression, for he was egged on by his heart.

He had come to *The Spring* today absolutely determined to speak, but the trees were so bare, the sky so dismal, that he was silent, and the first breath of winter made him shiver. Madeleine too felt the cold. A silk scarf about her throat, and her feet tucked in under her skirts, she was still snapping off fragments of sear twig, without really thinking what she was at. Her eyes were on the gloomy, rain-heavy clouds sweeping across the sky. But at last, when it was time to go back, Guillaume did put his proposal to her. His voice was a little unsteady. He might have been asking a favour.

Madeleine heard him with every appearance of astonishment, indeed, almost of fright, and when he had spoken, to his surprise she said:

"Why not stay as we are? I do not complain, I am happy. . . . We should not love each other any more if we were married. . . . We might even disturb our happiness." And then, seeing him about to insist, she added brusquely:

"No, really, the idea frightens me."

Then, to soften the harshness and strangeness of what she had said, she began to laugh. She was astonished herself at what she had said, and at saying it so fiercely. The truth was that Guillaume's suggestion prompted a strange rebellion in her. She had the impression that he was asking something which was out of the question, as if she had not belonged to another and been possessed by that other, and she had spoken with the voice and the gesture of a married woman suddenly asked by an admirer to sleep with him.

Almost hurt, Guillaume would perhaps have withdrawn his offer, had he not felt obliged to plead the cause of their mutual love. As he spoke he grew heated, gradually forgetting the chill he had felt at heart when his mistress rejected him so curtly. Now he spread himself in fine words calculated to flatter her ear, painting a picture of the lovely, peaceful life they would live when they were married. At some length, stooping over her in a pose of mingled prayer and worship, he thus let his heart run off his tongue.

"I am an orphan," he said, "you are all I have in the world. Do not say you will not link your life with mine, or I shall have to believe that heaven still persecutes me with wrath and conclude that you do not love me enough to wish my happiness. If only you knew how much I need your affection. It is only you who have given me peace, only you who have opened the refuge of your arms to me. And today I do not know how to thank you, I offer you all I have, though this is nothing when compared with the glorious time you have given me and will still give me. Don't be silly, I have no doubts about it, I shall always be in your debt, Madeleine. We love each other, marriage cannot increase our love, but it will at least allow us to worship each other openly. And what a life ours will be! A life of peace and pride, endless confidence in the future, affection all the time. . . . Madeleine, I beg you . . ."

She listened, as if feeling unwell—or was it some suppressed impatience that twisted her lips into such a strange smile? When her lover did not know how to go on and paused, choking with the emotions which were mastering him, for an instant she said nothing. Then, in her harder voice, she said coldly:

"You cannot marry a woman whose past history you do not know. . . . I must tell you who I am, my origin, what I did before I met you."

But, rising to his feet, Guillaume was quick to seal her lips with his hand.

"Sh!" he cried, as if afraid of something. "I love you, I don't want to hear another word. . . . Don't be silly, I know you very well. I may not even be worthy of you, and you certainly have more will-power and are the stronger. You can never have done anything wrong. Besides, the past is dead. I am talking about the future."

Madeleine struggled against the grip of his supreme love and absolute faith. When she found what to say at last, "Listen to me," she said, "you are a child, I must do your reasoning for you. . . . You are rich, you are young, one day you will reproach me with having been too ready to accept your offer. . . . I have not a penny, I am only a poor girl. But I still want to keep my pride. I would hate, later, to have you charge me with tricking you into marrying me. . . . See, I am frank, am I not? I can make you a wonderful mistress. But if I become your wife, the very next day you will tell yourself that you ought to have married a girl with more money and one more worthy than I am."

Had Madeleine wanted to press this young man into marrying her, she could have not have found a better way. The suggestions she made nearly brought tears to his eyes. Then just like a child, he lost his temper, swearing he would get his own way, whatever resistance she put up.

"You just don't understand, my darling," he cried. "You wrong me, you know. . . . Why on earth say such things? Can you be ignorant of what I feel and what I have been dreaming during this year you and I have lived together? I would like to fall to sleep on your bosom and never waken more. You know very well that this is my heart's desire and you are wrong to ascribe the thoughts of other men to me. . . . I am a child, you say. Very well, all the better, you cannot fear a child who confides herself to you."

He went on, more gently now, repeating his emotional pleas. He talked so much that her heart was full. She began to weaken. She was touched by that hesitant voice so humbly offering her the forgiveness and the respect of society. And yet there still remained a vague rebellion deep in her heart. When her lover ended by saying: "You are free, why refuse me this happiness?" she gave a violent start.

"Free?" she cried, in a strange voice, then added: "Yes, I am free . . ."

"All right," went on Guillaume, "then stop talking about that past. If there has been some other love in your life, it is dead, I am marrying a widowed woman."

This choice of the word *widowed* struck her. She paled slightly. Her hard forehead, her grey eyes were expressive of pained anxiety.

"Let us go back," she said, suddenly. "It is getting dark. . . . I will give you your answer tomorrow."

They went back. The sky had darkened and the wind blew lugubriously through between the trees of the avenue. When at last Guillaume left her, he pressed her to him without a word. There was nothing more he could say, but by this last embrace he made a last attempt to take possession of her life.

Madeleine passed a sleepless night. When she was alone, she turned her lover's proposal over and over. Even though it did cause her that terrified bewilderment, the proposal of marriage was flattering. The mere thought had never entered her head. She would not have dared dream of such a thing. But when she reflected on the dignified, peaceful life which Guillaume offered her, she was very surprised to have been so stubborn, and, thinking again of the young man's gentle assurances, she was ashamed to have shown herself so hard and asked herself what inner feeling it could have been that prompted her thus to reject a union which she ought to have accepted with humility and gratitude. Why these fears, these hesitations? Was she not, as Guillaume said, a free agent? What compulsion was it that made her scorn this never-to-have-been-hoped-for happiness which was now offered her? She was lost amid all these questions, but the only response her body could give was a vague uneasiness. She herself could easily have found an answer, one which to her seemed stupid, ridiculous, one she avoided. The truth was, she was thinking of Jacques. Even as her sweetheart spoke to her, she had felt the memory of that man vaguely stirring in her bones. But it could surely not be that memory that troubled her? Why, Jacques was dead, and she owed him nothing, not even regret. What right would he have had to come to life in her to remind her that she belonged to him? And this instinctive uncertainty about her liberty which now came to her vexed her profoundly. Now that the phantom of her first love had reared up, she was fighting a hand to hand struggle against it. She wanted to master it, to prove that Jacques no longer possessed her. But for all her scornful laughter,

she was aware that only Jacques could have made her so hard towards Guillaume. That was monstrous, inexplicable. And when all this became clear to her amid the nightmares of her sleeplessness, she decided with all the violence of her character to silence the dead man once and for all by marrying the living one. Falling asleep in the small hours, she dreamt a nightmarish dream that the drowning man rose from the livid foaming sea, to snatch her from her husband's arm!

When Guillaume came round the next morning, trembling and full of anxiety, he found she was still in bed. He took her softly in his arms. She woke with a start, then flung her arms round his neck, as if to take refuge on his chest, and murmured the words: "I am yours." There followed prolonged kisses, passionate embraces. Each of them seemed to feel a terrible need to give, to be possessed by the other, so as to attain real conviction that their union was real.

The same afternoon, Guillaume saw to the marriage formalities. When that evening he told Geneviève that he was going to marry a young lady who lived in the district, the devout old Protestant fixed him with her malicious eyes.

"That would probably be best," she said.

Then he understood that Geneviève knew all about it. No doubt he had been seen about with Madeleine, and tongues were already wagging hard all over the countryside. This hint of Geneviève's made him bring their wedding day still further forward than he had planned. They only needed a few weeks to prepare, and they were joined in matrimony early that winter, at a ceremony which was almost secret. There were only five or six inquisitive Véteuil folk to see them enter their carriage when they left first the Town Hall, then the church. Back at *Noiraude*, after thanking their witnesses, they withdrew altogether from the world. They were at home, united for ever.

CHAPTER SIX

THE four years which followed were tranquil and happy. The de Viargues spent the whole time at *Noiraude*. In the first year of their marriage they did propose to travel, either in Italy or down the Rhine, in customary fashion. But invariably, when the time came to leave, they changed their minds. They could see no point in going so far away to look for happiness while they had it where they were. They did not even once go to Paris. The memories they had left behind them in Boulogne Street worried them. Locked away in their precious retreat they felt they were protected against the misfortunes of the world and proof against suffering.

Guillaume was at the height of bliss. This marriage was the realization of his youthful dreams. He now lived a rounded-off existence, without shocks, a life which was all peace and affection. Ever since Madeleine had come to *Noiraude* he had been able to hope and dream of the future without a tremor. For the future was to be just like the present, one long fond slumber, a succession of days all alike, all equally happy. His troubled mind needed such a guarantee of uninterrupted peace, and his dearest wish was to continue like that, spared any event whatsoever, living an utterly dead life, a life all gentleness till the very end. With so languorous an existence he never contemplated emerging from his repose.

Madeleine too was in a sweet state of quiescence. In the tranquillity of her present life she found delicious rest from the anxieties of former years. There was nothing more to wound her. She now had the possibility of self-respect and could forget the shame of her past. She shared the fortune of her husband without scruple and reigned as his legitimate wife. The solitude of *Noiraude*'s vast, blackened, and rather dilapidated stones suited her. She did not want Guillaume to modernize the old building. She merely had a set of first-floor rooms and the dining-room and sitting-room on the ground-floor done out. The rest of the rambling old house remained locked. In all those four years the de Viargues did not once go up to the attics. Madeleine liked to feel all that emptiness around her, it seemed to insulate her more and protect her better against any hurt

from without. She particularly liked to sit dreaming in the downstairs living-room. From the ceiling of that vast room seeped a silence which soothed her. Its shadowy depths inspired dreams of the vast, tranquil spaces of night. At night, when the lamp was lighted, she found it exceedingly soothing to be entirely alone in the heart of that infinity. There was not a sound from the country around. Absolute inward peace, as of a monastery, the perfect tranquillity of the sleeping landscape all about it, took possession of *Noiraude* in those evening hours. But then sometimes to Madeleine would come thoughts of one of those wild, gay nights she had spent with Jacques, in Soufflot Street. To her ears came the deafening din of iron-bound carriage wheels and horses' hoofs on the Paris *pavé*, in her eyes glared the harsh light of the gas-jets, and for an instant she was back in that tiny Soufflot Street hotel room amid tobacco smoke, the clink of glasses, and the noise of laughter and kisses—no more than a flash, like a puff of sickening hot air blown suddenly against her, but she would suddenly stare about her, aghast, already choking. But as she saw that she was indeed in this vast, gloomy, unpopulated living-room of *Noiraude* she would take a deep breath, and come back to reality from the nightmare, once again confident, once again warm with unfevered love, sinking back with enjoyment greater than even before deep into the shadows and the silence which surrounded her. To her cold, matter-of-fact nature, after those physical buffetings which fate had previously brought her this deadly life was all enchantment. She was grateful for the chill spaciousness of the ceiling, for the massive, silent walls, for the whole vast building enclosing her like a shroud, and she would reach out a hand to Guillaume to show her gratitude, for was it not he who had cured her by restoring her lost dignity, he who was her beloved saviour?

Thus the young couple passed the winter months, in almost complete solitude. All day, they never left the ground-floor room. An enormous fire of quartered logs glowed red on the tiles of the huge hearth, and here they spent the whole livelong day, each day like the one before it, leading a clockwork life, sticking to habits with all the stubbornness of those who, completely happy though they be, fear the slightest disturbance of their equilibrium. They hardly did anything. They never felt any tedium. Or rather, the dull climate of tedium in which they were cradled seemed to them to be real bliss. They did not even resort to passionate embraces, let alone seek recondite forms of love, to help them pass those slow-moving hours.

It does happen that for a time two lovers can lock themselves away together in each other's arms in order for a season to satisfy their desires, their days too transformed into nights of love. But Guillaume and Madeleine were content merely to receive each other's smiles. Their solitude remained uninterruptedly virginal. If they made their room a prison, it was not because they had embraces to conceal, but because they liked the great stillness of winter and all the peace of the cold season. Their sole desire was to exist each to each alone, in mutual exchange of each other's mere proximity.

Then, as soon as the weather improved, they opened up the windows, later to emerge into the park and then, instead of finding isolation in the large living-room, it was deep in this or that thicket that they hid. Nothing changed. They lived through the summer too after their own fashion, wild creatures, withdrawn, fleeing from all noise. Guillaume preferred the winter, with the warm, damp atmosphere of the hearth, but Madeleine never ceased to worship the sun, that fierce sun which stung her shoulders and made her blood pulse with slow, powerful beat. Often she drew her husband out into the fields and they would pay a visit to their spring, or follow the river avenue, their thoughts on their former walks that way, or they would again go visiting the farms around and get lost deep amid the meadows, far from any village. Their dearest pilgrimage, however, was to go and spend an afternoon at the little house which Madeleine had rented that first summer. Some months after their marriage, they had bought the house. It was unthinkable to them that it should not be theirs. Every time afterwards that they went that way they had felt an irrepressible desire to go in, but when they had acquired it, their minds were at rest. Now, they told themselves, nobody could dispel the memories of the sweet hours they had spent there, and when warmer days came round, they used sometimes to go across the fields to it, to spend a few hours there. Though no more than ten minutes walk from *Noiraude*, it became a sort of country cottage to them. Once there, indeed, they were still more alone, for they had issued instructions that nobody was ever to disturb them there. They even on occasion spent the night there, and then the whole world would be forgotten. Guillaume often remarked:

"If ever any misfortune comes on us, we shall come here to forget, here we should be strong against suffering."

Thus the months flowed by, season succeeding to season. Before the first year of their union was out a great happiness was vouchsafed them: Madeleine gave birth to a daughter. Guillaume welcomed

this child, which might have come from his mistress, but was now born of his lawful wife, with profound gratitude. In this delay of maternity in Madeleine he saw the good intentions of heaven. Little Lucie alone was sufficient to people their solitude. For all her physical strength, Madeleine was unable to suckle the child, and for this purpose took a young woman who had worked for her before she was married, and this young person, whose father farmed the land formerly attached to the cottage, was wet-nurse to the babe within reach of *Noiraude*, Guillaume and Madeleine going daily to see how their child was faring. Later, when Lucie was bigger, they frequently allowed her to spend weeks on end at the farm, where she was very happy and lived healthily. They now saw her every afternoon, going out to the cottage for greater seclusion, and would take Lucie there with them, finding exquisite delight in mingling this golden-haired little creature with their memories. To the snug little rooms where they had loved, the darling child added an aroma of childhood and with tender feelings they would listen to her babbling and dream about the past. When they were all three together in their retreat, Guillaume would take blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked laughing Lucie on his knees.

"Madeleine," he would say, gently, "here is our present and our future."

And Madeleine would smile placidly back at him. Maternity had stabilized her. Before, she had always had sudden girlish whims and done silly, unexpected things, like all young things in love, used to let down her auburn hair over her shoulders with uninhibited innocence, and let her hips sway frankly as she walked, her grey eyes and scarlet lips often reflecting an impudence of desire. Now, her whole person had grown more placid. Marriage had brought her a sort of precocious maturity. Her body took on a measure of stoutness, its movements became more gentle, steadier, and that auburn hair was now painstakingly plaited, coiled and twisted, to frame her calm features in the vigour of its heavy coils. The girl in her was yielding place to the mother, to fecundity in the wife enthroned in the plenitude of her beauty. What contributed most to Madeleine's dignified bearing, to her magnificent air of peace and health, to her complexion, clear and smooth like tranquil waters, was her inward satisfaction. She felt free, she lived proudly, content with herself. Her new way of life was an environment which favoured her unhindered development. Even in the very first months which she spent in the country, she blossomed forth in happiness and

strength. But then there had still remained a roughness in her. Now, that had been transformed into serenity.

Guillaume found great calm in Madeleine's radiant vigour. When he drew her to his bosom, she gave him strength. He loved to rest his head on her breast, listening to the measured beating of her heart. That steady beat regulated his life. A highly-strung woman, hot by temperament, would have caused him frightful anxieties, the more since his own body and soul quivered at the slightest touch. Madeleine's steady breathing, on the contrary, fortified him. He became a man. His frailty was transformed into gentleness. This young woman had absorbed him and now bore him within her. As always happens in any marriage, the stronger person had taken fatal possession of the weaker, and from now on Guillaume belonged to this woman who dominated him, belonged to her strangely and profoundly. It was an uninterrupted influence on him, an influence with its own little sorrows and its delights, according to every slight change in her mood. Guillaume disappeared, and never imposed himself. But he would have been the first to object, had he not been carried away by Madeleine's will, for from now on his peace depended on her, whose life was of necessity his too. If she remained calm, he would live tranquil at her side. Were she to lose her head, he would feel carried away likewise. It was a complete penetration of body and soul.

Life, however, opened, vast and untroubled, before them, and they could look ahead without fear. Four years of genuine happiness were a proof of security against shock. Guillaume was content to leave everything to her and feel himself breathe and grow by the will of his wife. He would sometimes smile and remark: "You wear the trousers, Madeleine." Then, full of embarrassment at this power which she assumed despite herself, by the sheer force of her character, she would embrace him. Merely to see them walking through the park with little Lucie between them, holding their hands, was enough to divine what serene delight they knew in their marriage. The child was a powerful link between them. When she was not there, though their even gait evidenced such intimacy that nobody on earth would have thought there could ever be a clash between these two people, Guillaume looked fragile beside Madeleine.

For the first few years they only saw rare visitors. They knew few people and made friends badly, being chary of new faces. Most of their invitations came from the de Rieus, who spent their winters

in Paris, but came to Véteuil every summer. De Rieu had long ago been the most intimate friend of Guillaume's father. A tall man, he was well advanced in years, of aristocratic bearing, stiff and sarcastic. Sharp as steel blades, his pale lips would occasionally flash into a smile. Stricken with almost total deafness, he had transferred to his eyes all the keenness of the sense which he had lost. He saw the smallest thing, even what happened behind him. But he never gave the appearance of seeing, was always grave and it would never be by more than a crease of his lips that he would show that he had seen or overheard anything. Entering a room, he would plant himself in an armchair and there remain for hours on end, as if lost, deep in his eternal silence, apparently asleep, his head leaning back on the chair, his features immobile, his eyes half closed. In truth he would be following the conversation by the slightest changes of physiognomy of the participants. He found a particular delight in this exercise. It gave him a savage pleasure to note the dirty or mischievous ideas which were to be detected on the faces of those who thought him a deaf dummy before which they could expose the gravest secrets with impunity. To de Rieu there was no such thing as a smile, or an expression of pure charm or beauty; they were all so many grimaces. To one who heard nothing, the sudden contraction of a person's features or the silly expression on a face could be most grotesque. If two people were talking in his presence, he would fix on them a curious glance, as if they were two snarling animals, and wonder which was about to gobble up the other. This incessant study, this observing of others and this connoisseurship of what he called human grimacing had given him a grand disdain for mankind. Suffering from his deafness, which he would never admit to worry him, he sometimes told himself that he was lucky to be deaf and be able to retire into a corner. His pride of blood was transformed into merciless sarcasm. He seemed to think he lived surrounded by a species of miserable puppets, splashing about in the mud like so many stray curs, which came slavishly to heel at the crack of a whip or on a dung-heap fought for possession of a bone. His lifeless, haughty countenance was a constant protest against the chaotic mobility of other physiognomies and his malicious laughter was the snigger of a man who finds entertainment in shabby conduct and would never sink so low as to be angry with creatures devoid of reason.

Nevertheless, he had a weak spot in his heart for the young de Viargues, though this was still not sufficient to dispel his scornful

curiosity. Whenever he visited *Noiraude*, he would look pityingly at his young friend, Guillaume. He was well aware of all his gestures of worship for Madeleine, and this sight of a man grovelling before a woman always seemed to him monstrous. But the young couple had little to say and their features maintained a condition of relative placidity, so to him they seemed the most rational people he had ever met, and he enjoyed going to see them. His real victim, the eternal object of his bitterest observation and mockery, was his own wife.

Hélène de Rieu, who usually accompanied him to *Noiraude*, was in her forties, a round little body, a faded blonde, with, to her great despair, a tendency to put on flesh. Imagine a doll getting old. She was very artificial, worshipped childish things, had a whole battery of pet faces, sidelong glances and covert smiles, playing on her face as if it were some wonderful instrument which was bound to seduce anybody. She did not leave her expression at rest for an instant. Now she would look languishingly downwards, now suddenly heavenwards in a burst of poetic fire, turning this way and that or looking just coy, according to whether she wished to assume the attack or the defence. She waged a terrible war against the years which were laying on fat and furrowing her countenance and neck with wrinkles. She was all ointments and skin lotions, she laced herself in corsets which choked her, and she fancied she was thereby getting younger.

This was her ridiculous side. There was also a nasty one. She looked on her husband as a block of wood which she had married to enable her to play a part in society and she therefore thought it quite forgivable never to have loved the man. "Get away with you, how can you talk love to a man who can't hear you," she would say to her intimates, and then assume the air of all unfortunate, misunderstood wives. The truth was that Hélène de Rieu found lavish consolation. Not to waste that verbal petty cash of love which it was no use parroting to de Rieu, she hawked it round to those whose hearing was good, always picking for her lovers younger, susceptible men, boys of eighteen or at most twenty years. Her infantile tastes required pink-cheeked striplings who still smelt of mammy's milk. Had she dared go so far, she would have debauched all the schoolboys who came her way, for in this passion for babies there was a strain of an appetite for disgraceful little perversions, a craving to be able to teach boys recondite tricks of love and herself taste peculiar pleasures in the gentle grip of arms still too weak for it all. In bed,

she was babyish. She liked furtive kisses which tickled rather than forced their way. Thus she was always to be found with a following of half a dozen youths. She hid them under her bed, in cupboards, wherever she could tuck them. Her happiness consisted in having half a dozen docile lovers at her heels. She soon wore them out, changing them every fortnight, living in a constant replacement of lovers. She used to look like the mistress of a boarding-school with a bunch of her pupils trailing after her. She never lacked admirers, taking them anywhere, among all the host of young fools whose dream it is to have a middle-aged married woman for mistress. Her forty years, her ludicrous little-girl mannerisms and her pale faded puffiness, all repellent to adult men, proved an invincible attraction to young idiots of sixteen.

In her husband's eyes, Hélène was a most interesting and unusual piece of mechanism. He had married her in a moment of boredom, and if he had thought her worth his anger, would have turned her out the very next day, but the laborious efforts of this coquettish woman's features afforded him intense pleasures. He was always trying to glimpse the hidden levers which worked her clockwork eyes and lips. Her pallid, cream be-plastered face, never for a moment at rest, seemed to him lugubriously comic with all its blinkings and pursings of the lips and all that swift, soundless play of feature. It was long contemplation of his own wife that had finally convinced him that the human species was made up of stupid, malicious puppets. When he probed beneath that ageing dollie's wrinkles, it was, beneath her grimacing, to discover hidden things so degraded and withal so stupid that he really ought to have given her a whipping. Instead, he preferred to amuse himself watching her and despising her. Her treated her as a domestic animal. Her nasty tricks touched him personally as little as the wailing of a female cat on heat. Placing his own honour far above the shameful doings of such a creature, he regarded the display of all those youths trooping in and out of his wife's bedroom with superb disdain and icy sarcasm. One would have said that he took a real delight in exhibiting his scorn for humankind and his denial of the existence of any decency by thus tolerating the filthy acts which took place under his own roof, and he appeared to accept adultery and debauch as acts common to all and quite natural. His silence and cruelly mocking smile said: "This world is a cesspool, and if I happen to have tumbled into it, better put up with it."

Hélène de Rieu was almost entirely unabashed by her husband's

presence. Convinced he could not hear, she addressed her lovers with self-evident language in his presence. He of course lip-read each word, but continued to show the young men every courtesy. Their worked-up state entertained him and he also liked compelling them to shout polite phrases into his ear. He never evinced the slightest surprise at seeing his drawing-room fill every month with new faces, but received his wife's schoolboys with a scalding sarcasm well wrapped in paternal kindliness. He would ask them how old they were and what subjects they were studying. "We are very fond of young folk," he would often say, in a tone of ironic friendliness. And when they left the drawing-room he would complain of the way young folk will run away from the elderly. One day, when his wife seemed rather deserted, he even went so far as to bring in a lad of seventeen himself. But this newcomer to the line of suitors was hunchbacked, and Hélène lost no time dismissing him. At times, de Rieu could be even more cruel. He burst into her room one morning and kept her on tenterhooks for a good hour with small talk about the weather and such things, while all the time a poor lad lay stifling under the blankets, hastily pulled over him when the husband unexpectedly entered. At Véteuil he was said to be the author of a cuckold's wisecrack which went the round of country towns in those parts. Catching his wife *in flagrante delicto* with a young rascal playing truant from school, he was said to have confined himself to addressing the young lover, in tones of icy politeness, with the observation: "Really, sir, at your age, and of your own free will! What a stout heart you must have!" Otherwise, he was never the man to poke his nose in at such a moment, but preferred to be as blind as he was deaf, for that allowed him to maintain his dignified bearing and devastating impassivity. What made his pleasure in it all the more subtle was the silliness of his wife, for ever imagining him so stupid as not to suspect. But he invariably maintained his kindly air, scratching her with that superb courtesy of his till the blood flowed, and putting a real gourmet's enjoyment into the bitterness of the two-edged things he said to her, the refined cruelty of which only he could know. There was never a moment but he had his fun with her, and he would have been genuinely put out, had she ever suddenly mended her ways. The fact was, de Rieu would have liked to find out how far scorn could go.

Between this sarcastic character and the disjointed mind of the old Count de Viargue there was a sort of natural understanding which explains the two old men's friendship. They had both reached the

same degree of disdain and negation, the scientist by his belief that he had put his finger on the void and the deaf man with his notion that the human mask concealed the muzzle of a lubricious beast. While de Viargue was alive, de Rieu was the only man ever to enter his laboratory. They spent whole days there together. The research chemist's suicide did not even seem a surprise to his old friend. The following summer, there he was at *Noiraude* again, with complete equanimity, the only difference being that now he allowed himself to bring his wife with her trail of young men.

When they first called, Madeleine and Guillaume had already been married for some months. Hélène brought with her her latest conquest, a Véteuil lad whom she had taken on as a sort of paying guest to wile away the tedium of her stay in the country. Tiburce Rouillard was his name. He was inclined to be self-conscious about his Christian name, but was very proud of the surname. The son of an old cattle dealer who must have left him a tidy sum, young Rouillard was most ambitious. While he vegetated at Véteuil, he planned to do big things in Paris. Squat, cunning, capable of any scoundrelly trick if it but suited his book, he felt himself a strong character. He was one of those rascals who tell themselves they are going to be multi-millionaires and invariably get there. When Hélène de Rieu undertook his weaning, she thought that as usual she would have to deal with a child, but the truth was that this child was already rotten with vice and if he made himself out to be a novice and hesitant in matters of sex, that was only because it suited his game. At last Hélène had saddled herself with a master. Tiburce, who seemed by accident to cross her path, had in fact for some time been adding up how to fool her. He told himself that, if exploited with skill, a love affair with such a woman would take him to Paris and straight into the best society. He was therefore going to make himself indispensable to his mistress's depraved tastes and, whether she liked it or not, as soon as he had her under his hand, a submissive slave, she was going to be his lever to fortune. Had he not had this scheme in mind, he would have roared with laughter in her face the first time they got into a bed together. This elderly woman, with all her idealistic talk and her filthy tastes, was monstrously comical to him. He emerged from her embrace feeling rather wretched, but he was a lad of pluck who would have dived into any river if there was a sovereign to be picked up.

Madame de Rieu seemed delighted by her young lover. He continued to feed her on the most delightful flattery and proved of

rare docility. Never before had she come on a more spicy innocence in one who was only a novice at vice. She became so fond of the rascal that her husband had to resort to all manner of precautions not to come upon them in each other's arms. She took Tiburce about like a young dog, continually calling him to her or reprimanding him with look or tone of voice. When she introduced him at *Noiraude*, he considered this to be the first service she had rendered him. He had happened to be at school for a short time at the same time as Guillaume, and then had been one of his most savage tormentors. Guillaume's junior by two or three years, he had taken advantage of the latter's state of pariah bewilderment to taste the wicked delight of bullying a lad who was his senior. Now, he much regretted that youthful mistake, for he had taken as his guiding principle the notion that one should only bully the poor, those whom one is never likely subsequently to need. Before he knew Hélène, he had investigated ways and means of getting the entrée at *Noiraude*, but at that time Guillaume hardly acknowledged his salutations in the street. Once, however, his mistress had got him in under her skirts, he grovelled before his former victim, taking pains to bring out the indication of nobility—the *de*—so that there was no mistaking it—much indeed as once he had insisted on that word "bastard." His scheme now was to assume a certain standing at Véteuil by getting on hail-fellow-well-met terms with all the local nobility and gentry, and those with money. Nor would it have displeased him to milk Guillaume and Madeleine a little, to help towards building up his fortune. He even tried to pay court to the latter. He had an inkling of her secret love affairs, and this made him think she would be an easy prey. Were he able to seduce her, he thought, he would have two women instead of one in his service. He was already dreaming of how he would set one against the other to spur them both on and price up his attentions. But Madeleine met his declarations of love with such scorn that he was obliged to drop that idea at once.

The truth is, the de Viargues loathed having Tiburce Rouillard make himself at home at *Noiraude*. Apart from his cunning, this man had much provincial stupidity in his make-up and an animal pride which was very blatant, and which Guillaume found it hard to bear with. When this cad called him his "friend" with a sort of smug intimacy, he felt he wanted to kick him out of the house, and certainly it would have ended like that, had he not been afraid of causing a scandal which would affect old de Rieu. For this reason, Madeleine

and he put up with the intruder as best they could. After all, they were snug in the depths of their own mutual affection and they entertained very little, forgetting any visitors altogether the moment the door closed behind them.

Once a week, however, on Sundays, they could count on seeing that particular triangular party come to spend the evening with them. Hélène de Rieu would enter the house first, on her lover's arm, de Rieu following, grave and disinterested. They would then all go into the park, where they were obliged to be witnesses of the languishing airs of the lady and the respectful attentions of the young man, while the husband, seating himself opposite them, through half-closed eyes watched it all. From certain scabrous and also cruel, leering lights of Tiburce's beardless jaw, de Rieu had clearly divined the evil nature and evil intentions of that young man. His skill as observer told him that his wife had fallen into the hands of a master who would one day manhandle her severely. The show therefore promised to be an engaging one and he was delighting in advance in the forthcoming clash between the two puppets. He thought he could distinguish claws on the tips of the fingers which so far still fondled Hélène and he was all expectation of the moment when at last she first felt them prick her skin, and cried out, in vain. Thus would she be punished by vice itself, and quiver and grovel at the young flesh of a mere stripling—she who had devoured so much milky young flesh. Silent and mocking, de Rieu thus mused on the vengeance which fortune had vouchsafed him. There were instants when the ice-cold features of the son of the former cattle dealer, with their contortions as of affection, very nearly appalled even de Rieu, but he treated Rouillard with great cordiality and seemed almost to cosset him as one might a bull-dog one had trained specifically to bite people.

Madeleine, who knew something of this love life of Madame de Rieu, had always regarded the woman with a sort of amazement. However could she sleep peacefully while living such a debauched life? Asking herself this, she felt she was entertaining a monster, a rare specimen, indeed, of disease. The fact is, Madeleine's was one of those healthy, cold natures only able to accept clean situations. If she felt that she had herself trodden in mud, that had been by accident, and long too had she suffered for that backsliding. But her pride could never have made its peace with the shocks and wounds that adultery brings. To her, an environment of respect and peace was essential, a climate in which she could hold her head high.

Whenever she had Hélène de Rieu before her, she could not help thinking of the anxieties which must worry that woman when she was hiding a lover in her bed. Not being at all highly-sexed herself, she could never grasp what terrible attraction others found in the physical side of love. To her mind it meant only suffering—fear of shame before one's husband, cruelty, often enough, in the embraces of the lover, and a life constantly torn by the caresses and rages either of one man or the other. Her open character would never have accepted such a life of baseness and falsehood, she would have rebelled against it at the first pang she felt. Soft characters and frail bodies, however, bend under blows and finally even find their sheer anxiety a voluptuous refuge, in which they gladly sleep. Looking at Hélène de Rieu's shining, oily-skinned face, Madeleine told herself that if ever she gave herself to another man, she would kill herself. For her it could only be Guillaume.

Four seasons running, these visitors came to *Noiraude*. Tiburce's father forced him to stay at Véteuil, where he had articled him to a lawyer, and this young fellow gnawed his knuckles raw, not to be able to follow his mistress to Paris. She was so touched by his mortification that twice she spent part of the winter in the country, and she was there as soon as spring came in, to resume the affair with him with increasing avidity. She had lost control of herself and was unable now to find another lover to match him. Tiburce meanwhile had conceived a remarkable loathing for her, and when she had turned up this December, had wished he might turn a deaf ear. Her frightful embraces became most obnoxious to him, for he now saw no immediate means of making use of them. Four seasons of useless love with this woman, who might have been his mother, had so exasperated him that the time came when he was on the point of getting his own back at last by giving her a good drubbing and leaving her, when his father had the good grace to be the victim of a stroke and to pass away. In less than a fortnight, young Rouillard was on the way to Paris, travelling back there with Hélène, more courteous and more attentive than ever before, and Monsieur de Rieu was once again able to brood over the couple through those half-closed eyelids of his.

When the de Rieus were away, particularly during the long winter evenings, Guillaume and Madeleine found themselves alone with only Geneviève for company. She lived with them on an equal footing, taking her meals with them, using the same rooms. She was now ninety, still erect, scraggier than ever and more angular, with

her knife-edge nose, her indrawn lips, and those wrinkles outlining her face and lending her features the rigour and the deep shadows of a sinister mask, and with undiminished fire in her grim soul. At night, when the day's work was done, she used to come to the big living-room where they sat, bringing with her that iron-bound Bible, which she would open wide and then, in the steady yellow glow of the oil-lamp, in sing-song fashion read out some verses. This would go on for a considerable time, a continuous dull mumble, broken only by the rasp of the pages as she turned them. In that night stillness, Geneviève seemed to be intoning a burial service, her voice droning out lamentations like the monotonous sound of the waves. The whole room would quiver with the sound, which might well have come from invisible lips, hidden deep in the shadows of the ceiling.

There were evenings when, catching fragments of the things which Geneviève read, Madeleine felt secret horror. It was the old lady's wont by preference to choose the more sordid pages of the Old Testament, stories of bloodshed and horror which worked her to a frenzy and imbued her voice with subdued frenzy. With implacable exultation she read of the wrath and jealousy of a terrible god, that God of the Prophets, the only one she knew. Apparently, he annihilated the earth at will, and with his cruel arm chastised human beings and inanimate objects alike. Whenever she came to verses telling of murder and burning, she read more slowly, the better to revel in the terrors of hell and the thunderbolts of Heaven's relentless justice. Her big Bible always revealed her Israel as prostrate and trembling at the feet of its judge, and through her own flesh ran that sacred shudder which had possessed the ancient Jews. And when she felt the blazing drops of the rain of Sodom fall on her shoulders, she forgot herself so far that she choked with sobs. Sometimes she took up the reading with a sinister tone in her voice, condemning just as Jehovah had condemned, and her unforgiving religious mania rejoiced in casting sinners down into the gulf. Striking down the guilty, slaughtering them, burning them, seemed to her holy work, for she looked upon God as an executioner who had assumed the mission of chastising an impious world.

This savage old soul was horrible to Madeleine. The colour would leave her cheeks. For had she not herself given a year of her life to win forgiveness? Forgiveness had indeed come to her, she was sure that the love and the respect of Guillaume had absolved her, but here even in the depths of that peace she had to hear this inexorable

talk of chastisement. Did the Lord then never forgive a mistake? Was she to bear the burden of a sin of her youth till death took her? Was she yet some day to pay full toll of repentance? These thoughts intruded on her tranquil life and made her wonder with vague uneasiness what the future held for her. She was then aghast at her momentary peace, at this unruffled sea on which she was cradled. Perhaps beneath that unbroken, clear surface there were new chasms opening up and it would need but a single inclement gust of wind to cast her out into the merciless, raging tempest and drown her in the depths of savage seas? This heaven that Geneviève revealed to her, this grim court of inquisitors, this form of torture chamber where there were cries of agony and the reek of burnt flesh, seemed to her a bloodstained vision. Long ago, at the time of her first communion, when she was at school, she had been taught that paradise was a sort of delightful cake-shop, full of lovely sweet things given away to the elect by fair-haired, pink angels. The time had come when this child's belief made her smile. Since then she had never gone to church. Now she saw the sweet-shop transformed into an assize court, but though she could no more believe the everlasting red-hot irons of the cherubin than the sweets of eternity, these wretched pictures evoked by the mad old fanatic, even though they did not exactly instil her with the fear of the Lord, certainly did worry her strangely and make her brood on her earlier life. She clearly saw that if ever Geneviève were to learn of her sin, the old woman would condemn her to one of those torments of which she spoke with such lust. Stern and disdainful by reason of her own unsullied life, Geneviève would be implacable, and there were now moments when Madeleine got the impression that the old woman was quizzing her unpleasantly, and she would lower her glance, almost blushing, quivering like a guilty person with no pardon to hope for. For all that she could not believe in God, she did believe in powers and ineluctable fate. Rigid and fleshless, pitiless and cruel, Geneviève seemed to rear up and cry: "You carry in yourself the pangs of your past life and one day those pangs will rise in your gullet and choke you." She had the impression that over *Noiraude* hovered Fate itself, haunting her, reciting lugubrious penitential verses from the Bible.

When she was alone again with Guillaume, in their bedroom, she would reflect on those secret shudders she had suffered from during the evening, and in spite of herself she then spoke of the vague fear which the old Protestant excited in her.

"I am a child," she said to her husband one evening, with a restrained smile, "but Geneviève really frightened me today. There she sat beside us, muttering such terrible things. . . . Couldn't you get her to read her Bible somewhere else?"

"Pooh!" Guillaume replied, with an easy laugh. "Don't you think that might upset the old dear? She's only trying to save us by half pretending it concerns us. All the same, I will ask her tomorrow not to read quite so loudly."

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Madeleine stared into space. She seemed once again to see all the visions the old woman had called up, and her lips moved uneasily.

"She spoke of blood and wrath." she began again, slowly. "There's no trace of the indulgence of old age in Geneviève. She would be merciless. . . . How can she be so harsh, living with us as she does, in our happiness, and our peace? Really, Guillaume, there are moments when that old thing makes me quite afraid."

Still Guillaume laughed at her.

"My pet," he said, taking his wife in his arms, "what a frightened child you are this evening! Come, let's get into bed! And no bad dreams, mind! . . . Geneviève is only an old madwoman. You are making a great mistake if you take any notice of her lugubrious litanies. You must get used to it. Why, there was once a time when I myself could not see her open that Bible without being frightened. Today, I think I should miss it if she did not sit there muttering. It's become like a lullaby. . . . Don't you find it rather lovely in the evening, to sit there, loving each other as we do, with that tremulous old voice of hers the only sound?"

"Yes, sometimes," his young woman agreed. "Whenever I can't tell what she's saying and her voice is just like the wind in the chimney. . . . But what horrible tales, what crimes and what punishment she does sometimes read about!"

"Geneviève," Guillaume replied, "is very devoted. She saves us a lot of trouble by running this big place. She saw me born, she even saw my father born. Do you realize she must be over ninety, and still vigorous and erect? She will go on working till she's over a hundred. . . . We ought to be fond of her, Madeleine, she's a very old servant of my family."

Madeleine was not listening. She was deep in a disturbing reverie. Suddenly with real anxiety, she asked him if he too believed that Heaven never forgave? He was taken by surprise. Indeed, the question made him quite melancholic. Then, putting his arms round

her and, with deep emotion, he asked her why she should suddenly doubt in forgiveness. She did not reply directly, only whispered:

"Geneviève says that Heaven needs its full count of souls to punish. . . . There is never any pardon."

This scene recurred again and again. This, however, was the only thing that ever disturbed the two young people in their conjugal serenity, and thus they passed the first four years of their marriage, in a solitude which was only slightly troubled by the calls of the de Rieus and a happiness which Geneviève's lamentations were incapable seriously of spoiling. It needed a much harsher blow to pitch them back into tribulation.

It was at the beginning of the fifth year, towards the end of October, that Tiburce went to Paris with Hélène de Rieu. Sure now that they would not be disturbed, Guillaume and Madeleine made ready to spend their winter in the peace of that vast living-room where they had already spent four such tranquil winters. For a moment there was indeed talk of going to Paris to spend a time in their maisonette in Boulogne Street, but this trip they decided to put off till the following winter—just as they did every year. In fact, they saw no need ever to leave *Noiraude*. For two months, till January, they led a secluded life, enlivened by the babbling of their little daughter, who was now getting quite a big girl. A sovereign peace lulled them to sleep, and they were so sure they would never be disturbed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Towards the middle of January, Guillaume had to go to Mantes. A business matter which he could not leave to anyone else was going to keep him there late into the evening. He drove off in the gig, telling Madeleine he would be back towards eleven, and she waited up for him, together with Geneviève.

After dinner, when the table was cleared, the old Protestant opened her big Bible as usual, and read random pages as this or that caught her eye. After some time, the book opened at the delightful story of the sinful woman who poured perfumes over Jesus' feet, whereupon he forgave her her sins and told her to go in peace. It was rarely that the old fanatic chose anything from the New Testament; those tales of redemption and parables full of delicate, refined poetry never satisfied the grim demands of her sombre intellect. On this occasion, whether in response to chance, which opened her Bible at this more charitable passage, or being moved by some vague, sub-conscious thought, Geneviève now intoned the story of Mary Magdalene in tones which were meditative and almost gentle.

Through the silence of the big sitting-room came the whispered undertone: "And a woman of the town who lived a bad life, hearing that he was at table in the house of the Pharisee, took there a pot of alabaster, full of sweet-scented oil. And, lingering behind, at the feet of Jesus, she began to weep. She washed his feet with her tears and dried them away with her hair. She kissed his feet and anointed them with the oil . . ."

On she read, gradually raising her voice, the verses falling slowly from her lips like suppressed sobs.

Up to this point, Madeleine had been doing her best not to hear. Spending an evening closeted with Geneviève terrified her. She had taken a book herself and, seated in the ingle-nook, buried herself in her reading, impatiently awaiting Guillaume's return. The few words of Geneviève's chant which she did catch vaguely troubled her, but it was when the story of the repentant and pardoned sinner began that she raised her head and listed, caught by keen emotion.

One by one the lines fell from Geneviève's lips, and it seemed to Madeleine that this big Bible was talking about her and her shame, her tears and the anointing she had performed. Was not this poem of remorse and adoration hers? She had gone on her knees to Guillaume, and he had absolved her. Gradually, as the story was unfolded, an inexpressible gentleness took possession of her, broken by profound inward sighs, sighs of new remorse and new hope. She followed the story phrase by phrase, fervently awaiting Jesus' final words. At last Heaven was telling her that it was enough to have loved much and wept much to taste the delights of redemption. Her mind turned to her past life, to that liaison with Jacques. She found that though at times it still scalded her, the memory of him now only excited gentle feelings, sad feelings of repentance. The ashes of that love were cold, quite recently, the wind of mercy had scattered them, and they were gone. Like Mary Magdalene—the very name was really hers—she was able to live in seclusion, and find purification in her love. It was a supreme absolution which was vouchsafed her. If on occasion, when Geneviève was reading, she had thought she heard invisible tongues, hidden in the shadows of that vast room, menacing her with frightful punishments, at this instant she thought she could hear voices which caressed the ear and assured her that all was forgotten and she could be happy.

When Geneviève reached the lines about Jesus addressing the woman and saying: "Thy sins are forgiven," Madeleine smiled a smile of heavenly delight, and felt tears of gratitude moisten her eyes. She could not help thus revealing all the happiness she now felt.

"What a lovely story!" she said to Geneviève. "It has made me so happy listening to it. . . . You must read it to me again some time."

The old fanatic raised her head, and without a word of response eyed the younger woman with her hard eyes. She seemed surprised, even displeased, at Madeleine's liking for the gentle poetry of the New Testament.

"How much more I like this story," Madeleine continued, "than those cruel things you more often read out. After all, it is lovely both to forgive and to be forgiven. This sinning woman and Jesus both say so."

Geneviève rose to her feet. This sudden emotional tone of the younger woman stirred her to rebellion, and her eyes assumed a dull glint. Banging her Bible to, in her most sybil-like tones, she cried: "God the Father would not have forgiven her!"

These terrible words, with all their savage fanaticism, this blasphemy which was a denial of any kindliness, froze Madeleine's heart. She felt as if a cloak of lead had fallen back upon her shoulders. With brutality, old Geneviève was thrusting her back into the abyss from which she had so recently escaped. Heaven knew no pardon? She was just silly ever to have dreamed that Jesus could be kind? She was seized with real despair. "But whatever have I to fear?" she asked herself, "this old thing is out of her mind." Nevertheless, despite herself, she still had the premonition of a blow threatening her, making her look furtively and uneasily about her: the enormous room slumbered in the yellowish lamp-light, but the blazing logs shone lurid light on the chimney brickwork, and every object about Madeleine, lost in this profound silence of the wintry night, with the shaded light flooding low all about her, seemed to conceal an intangible misfortune lurking there.

Geneviève had gone to the window.

"It's Guillaume!" she said, suddenly, coming back into the room.

A reddish light had flashed through the windows and there came the sound of wheels grinding to a halt at the porch. But though only a few moments before this she had been impatient for her husband's return, now, instead of running to meet him, Madeleine took a chair and remained seated, her eyes on the door with strange anxiety, her heart thumping, without her knowing why.

In rushed Guillaume. He looked wild, but happily so. Tossing his hat on to a chair on the far side of the room, he wiped the perspiration from his forehead, though outside it was very cold. Up and down the room he rushed, then at last, as soon as he could get breath, halted, facing Madeleine, and cried:

"Guess whom I found in Mantes!"

He was burning with the desire to tell his secret without delay. Madeleine did not speak, or stir from her chair. This sudden wild excitement in Guillaume astonished her, almost frightened her.

"Come on," he cried again. "Guess . . . guess . . . you can have a thousand tries."

"But I have no idea," she said, at last. "We've no friend whom it could be such a pleasant surprise for you to meet."

"That's just where you're wrong," he replied. "I did come across a friend. My only friend, my best . . ."

"Your best friend?" she questioned back, dazed—and aghast.

Guillaume could not keep his good news back any longer. Taking his wife's hands in his:

"I found Jacques at Mantes!" he burst out, in triumph.

She did not utter a cry or move a limb, merely turned terribly pale.

"It can't be," she said, "Jacques—is dead."

"Oh no, not at all, Jacques is alive. It's all a very long story, I'll tell you later. . . . When I saw him at Mantes Station, I was afraid of him, I thought it was a ghost!"

And he burst into laughter, the wild laughter of a happy child. He released Madeleine's hands. They fell lifeless to her knees. She was shattered by this blow, speechless, a dead woman. She would have liked to take to her heels and run away, but could not stir a limb. So flabbergasted was she that all she could hear ringing in her ears were those terrible words of Geneviève—*God the Father would not have forgiven.* It was quite true. God the Father was not forgiving her. She had been right to feel misfortune haunting her, preparing to seize her by the throat and stifle her. She stared stupidly at the walls, as if the room were strange to her, and in this moment its stillness seemed terrible, for there was horror throbbing in her brain with dull persistent beat. In the end all she could do was stare at the old housekeeper, telling herself that it was none other than Geneviève who had brought this fate to her, Geneviève who had raised Jacques from the dead, to place between her and her husband.

Blind with happiness, Guillaume went across to Geneviève. "You must get the blue bedroom ready," he said.

"Is Jacques coming tomorrow?" asked Geneviève, for whom the surgeon was still but a lad.

At this resounding question, which was a final blow, Madeleine at last rose to her feet. Leaning against the back of her chair, unsteady, she intervened quickly.

"And why should he be coming tomorrow? He's not, surely? Jacques saw Guillaume at Mantes. That was all he wanted for now. Jacques has gone to Paris. He must have a lot to do there, so many friends to see. . . ."

She stammered on without any longer quite knowing what she was saying. Beside himself with delight, Guillaume roared with laughter.

"But he's here!" he cried. "Or rather, he will be in a moment. You don't think I was going to let him go, do you? He's helping unharness, the mare's got a cut fetlock . . . the roads were frightful, and it's an inky black night." Opening the window, he cried:

"Hallo there, Jacques! Will you be long?" And out of the darkness came a powerful voice:

"I'll be there in a jiffy!"

That voice struck Madeleine like a sledge-hammer. With a choking sigh, a hoarse cry of pain, she sank back into her chair. What would she not have given to die! Whatever was she going to say when Jacques entered the room? How was she to behave, faced with these two brothers, her husband of the moment and her lover of former days? She was out of her mind at thought of what was about to happen. She would burst into tears of anger or grief, she would hide her face in her hands, while Jacques and Guillaume would rush away from her in loathing. She would run wildly after them, heartbroken at having divided these two lifelong friends by her shame, no longer daring to find refuge in her husband's arms. "But he's here", came back to her mind, "or, he will be in a moment". Every second now was an aeon of pain. Her head turned fixedly towards the door, she closed her eyes at every little sound, afraid to look, and in this situation, this expectation which lasted more than a minute, there were enclosed all a lifetime's sufferings.

Meanwhile, Guillaume strode up and down the room, beside himself with delight, when suddenly, at last, he noticed how frightfully pale Madeleine had gone.

"But whatever is the matter?" he cried, rushing up to her.

"I don't really know," she stammered. "I have felt queer all the evening."

Then, with a tremendous effort, she summoned all the energy left in her for an attempt to put off the terrible explanation.

"I—I think I shall go to bed," she said, a little more firmly. "Your friend will be sure to want to sit up late, talking, and I really must rest. My head will burst. . . . I will meet him tomorrow."

For Guillaume, who had been looking forward to bringing together the two great affections of his life, this sudden indisposition of his wife was a great disappointment. He had been using the whip all the way from Mantes, and as a result the poor old mare had damaged a fetlock in a rut. He had felt a childish need to be back home. His one thought had been, as soon as possible to thrust open the dining-room door, his heart full of emotion at thought of the lovely, moving scene he would then behold. For a moment he had even had the childish urge to play a little trick on her and introduce Jacques as a complete stranger and enjoy her astonishment when she learned the stranger's real name.

The fact was, he was crazy with delight. From now on his heart would be full, full of love and full of friendship, which would make of his life one long happiness. He could see himself putting Jacques' hand in Madeleine's and saying to one and the other: "Here is your brother, here is your sister, love each other, let us all three love each other to our last breath." It was a dream which delighted his highly-strung, sentimental nature.

He tried to persuade his wife to stay up. He found it hard to put off till morning that heart's delight which he had been promising himself all the way out from Mantes. But Madeleine did seem so poorly that in the end he agreed, she had better go to bed. She was about to leave the living-room by the door which led through into the hall when, thinking she had caught the sound of footsteps, she started wildly back, as if to escape some sudden attack, then rushed away through the other door, which communicated with the drawing-room. She had only just closed the door when Jacques came into the dining-room behind her.

"Your mare's caught it badly," he said. "I've done a bit of veterinary work, you know, and I'm afraid she's pretty bad."

This however was said more to make conversation than anything else, while with some curiosity he looked all round the room. Being well acquainted with love as a sort of relish, he was very interested to see what sort of woman it was that his friend Guillaume could have married, with that weak, over-sensitive heart of his and those romantic notions of love which had used to make him laugh so much in years gone by.

Guillaume guessed what he was looking for.

"Madeleine's off colour this evening," he said. "You'll meet her in the morning."

He turned to Geneviève, who was still present.

"Quick," he said, "have the blue room got ready, Jacques must be worn out."

Geneviève had not failed to note how upset Madeleine had suddenly been, and it had been entirely due to the old woman's lively curiosity that she had stayed up at all, once her master was back. Long since her inquisitorial nose had scented sin in Guillaume's young wife. With her beauty and physical health, her auburn hair, and her red lips, to Geneviève Madeleine was the quintessence of things carnal, things infernal. Notwithstanding her Protestant hatred for graven images and the like, in her room the fanatical old woman kept an engraving of the temptation of St. Anthony, the devilish

mumbo-jumbo of which rather pleased her visionary soul. Those little imps of Satan, grimacing and torturing the poor saint and that gateway of Hell gaping there, ready to engulf virtue the moment it faltered, were faithful symbols of her own religious beliefs. In one corner of the scene were women lasciviously exposing their bosoms in front of the chaste-living hermit, and chance would have it that one of those women bore a distinct resemblance to Madeleine. This similarity of the two faces particularly struck Geneviève's imagination. She was horrified thus to find in Guillaume's young wife the same oily smile and luscious hair of that whore, that monster who was of the vomit of the abyss. She even began with witch-like frenzy to think of Madeleine by the Latinistic epithet *Lubriciter* printed against the female devil in the engraving. The whole of the bottom of this crudely printed picture was inscribed with imaginary names personifying the particular vice of each demon. When, at the news of Jacques' rising from the dead, Madeleine's features had suddenly become pinched, it was Geneviève's conviction that it was the imp that possessed her, compelling her in spite of herself thus to sneer with pain.

In short, Geneviève thought she had perceived the shameless reptile concealed under that mother-of-pearl skin, in that flesh of perdition, and the old woman would not have been so very astonished had she suddenly seen the gloriously voluptuous body of the young woman metamorphose into a loathsome toad. Though she could not understand what clash of wills it was that had upset the wretched woman, she was quite sure that it was sin choking her. So Geneviève swore silently that from now on she would keep her eye on Madeleine, to prevent her doing any harm, were she ever to try to get Satan (who had escaped from *Noiraude* through the chimney, with the late Count's soul) back into the old mansion.

Only when Jacques cheerfully took Geneviève's gnarled hands in his and squeezed them, and asked if she did not know him, did the old woman make any move to go up to see to the blue room. Jacques apologized for not having noticed her when he came in. How well she looked! he cried, younger than when he last saw her. He even succeeded in bringing a smile to her bloodless lips. Although a little clumsy, he had indeed all the easy manner of a robust bachelor who has got through life quite pleasantly, without acquiring any ties, or ever feeling a heart pang.

When Geneviève had gone, the two friends sat down before the dying fire. A rose-hued glow played over the hot wood coals. The spacious room resumed its sleepy peace.

"You're dropping with sleep, old man," laughed Guillaume. "I won't keep you up long, your room will soon be ready. . . . My dear fellow, it *is* good to have found you again! We must tell each other everything, everything! Just as we used to do, years ago, when, at this same hearth, after those wonderful fishing expeditions, we warmed our bones. What catches we did have!"

Jacques was all smiles too. They both spoke of days gone by, of the present and of the future, memories and expectations mingling as the talk led them. Of course, on the way out from Mantes, Guillaume had showered questions on Jacques: how he escaped drowning, why he never wrote all this time, what he intended to do now? He knew Jacques' story, but now he wanted to hear it all over again, with more detail and fresh surprises.

The newspaper which Guillaume had seen had been in error. Two men had escaped with their lives after the *Prophet* went down. They had been lucky enough to cling to a sloop carried away in the storm. Had the wind not driven this inshore, they might have died of hunger. They were cast on to the rocky coast with such violence that the sailor was badly crushed and Jacques himself nearly suffered the same fate, and was knocked unconscious. They were taken to a nearby house, where Jacques spent nearly a year, in the hands of an ignoramus of a doctor who twice nearly killed him. When at last he was well, instead of going back to France he quietly continued his journey and made for Cochin-China, where at last he took up his post. He had once written to his uncle, and in that letter had enclosed one to Guillaume, which the Véteuil lawyer was to pass on, but by this time that good man had already died, leaving his nephew about 10,000 francs annual income.

Jacques' letter must have gone astray. After that he never brought himself to write again. Jacques had that horror of pen and paper which is proper to men of action. Not that he exactly forgot his friend. He merely postponed, from day to day, the laconic few words he intended to write him, ending up by saying to himself, with all the lightheartedness of the good-time man, that there would always be time to tell Guillaume all the news that mattered when some day he returned to France.

The news of his heritage left him rather unmoved. At the time he had a native mistress, whose exotic beauty enchanted him. Later, she had left him. Disgusted with the army, he then had decided to come back to France to live in Paris on his income, and had disembarked only the day before, at Brest. He said he could really

only spare one night at *Noiraude*, he must go on to Toulon tomorrow without delay, one of his army friends, who had reached that port on another ship, was dying, and as it was a chap who had once saved him from a great piece of folly, he felt it his duty to be with him on his death-bed.

These details astonished Guillaume, to whom it all sounded like a story out of the *Thousand and One Nights*. He could never have imagined that so many facts could have happened in so short a time, his own life having entered a state of permanent sleep, his one thought being to achieve tranquillity and a sentimental love. His gentle, idle character rather tended to shrink from such a medley of events as this.

Thus the two friends talked on, enjoying themselves very much.

"Come!" cried Guillaume, for perhaps the twentieth time. "You can't really mean only one night, you can't go as soon as you've come? Oh no, give me a week."

"Out of the question," said Jacques. "I should feel a criminal if I left my poor friend alone at Toulon."

"Then you'll come back?"

"But of course I will, in a month's time, in a fortnight, perhaps."

"And for good?"

"For good, my dear fellow? I shall be yours, all yours. If you really wish, I'll spend next summer down here. But I must catch the train tomorrow evening. There, that gives you a day. Do what you will with me."

Guillaume was not paying attention, he was just staring sentimentally at his friend, apparently lost in blissful dreams.

"Look here, Jacques," he said, at last, "I've just been turning over a lovely idea which you might fit in with: come and make your home here, with us. This house is so big that sometimes we're very chilly. Half the rooms are unused, and these empty spaces which used to terrify me still make me feel vaguely uneasy. If you were here, I have a feeling that *Noiraude* would really be full. You can take over a whole floor if you like, and live your own bachelor life, as you choose. All I want is to have you about the place with your cheerful laughter and feel the good grip of your fist occasionally. What I can offer you is our tranquil happiness, our never-ending peace. If you only knew how beautifully snug it can be in a nook concealing two lovers. Now, tell me, doesn't our secluded burrow tempt you? Take up residence here, I beg you. Agree to spend your

life here, far from the turmoil and the world. Learn to enjoy our sleep, and you will see that you will never want to wake up. You will bring us your gaiety and we shall give our spirit of meditation. I shall always be your brother, and my wife shall be your sister."

To this romantic talk, Jacques listened with a smile. His whole attitude was one of gentle teasing.

"Come, come, just take a look at me!" was the only answer he would give.

He took up the lamp and held it to light his own face. The features had thickened. Sea winds and sun had tanned him a dark red, and the life he had led seemed to have made Jacques' features more crude. He looked bigger too, and was certainly stouter. His broad shoulders, his deep chest, his sturdy limbs, massive fists and animal head all combined to give him a pugilistic air. He had indeed returned somewhat coarsened. His butcher-like job had effaced certain delicate traits of his youth. He had eaten so much, laughed so much and lived his animal life so thoroughly during these army years that he no longer felt sentimental needs at all. The mere satisfaction of the flesh was enough for him. But at heart he was still a very decent fellow, even though he might be incapable of understanding friendship in the passionate, absolute way that Guillaume did. His dream was a life of positive pleasures, a life untrammelled by ties, a life flitting here and there, with fine moments spent in snug beds and good hours at the best tables. Guillaume, who so far had not really had a good look at him, was indeed rather astonished to find him grown so much older, and so well covered with solid flesh. Beside Jacques, he himself was no more than a fragile stripling.

"Well, I have taken a look," he said, though rather uneasily, for he could see what Jacques was leading up to.

"Now you withdraw your offer, don't you, my dear Guillaume?" cried Jacques, with a loud guffaw. "I should just pass out if I had to live in this tranquillity of yours, I should get a stroke before the year was out."

"Not at all, happiness brings life."

"But your happiness will never be mine! What a child you are! This house would be a grave to me. Even your friendship would never save me from the devastating tedium of those big empty rooms you've just been talking about. . . . I am frank. I know you and I won't quarrel." Then, seeing Guillaume was terribly put out by his rejection of the plan, he added: "I'm not saying I won't

ever accept your hospitality. I shall come and see you, and spend a month with you from time to time. Haven't I just asked myself if I can spend next summer here? But as soon as there's a nip in the air, it'll be Paris for me. . . . Bury myself here in the snow? Not on your life, my dear chap!"

His powerful voice and full-blooded cheerfulness touched poor Guillaume on the raw. He could not bear to see his precious dream shattered.

"But whatever do you think you will do in Paris?" he asked.

"Don't know," replied Jacques. "Probably nothing. I've done enough work. As my uncle had the excellent notion of leaving his income to me, I shall take myself off and live happily down south, in the sunshine. Oh, don't you fear, I shan't find time long. I shall eat well, I shall drink well, and to sweep the cobwebs away I shall have more pretty girls than I really need. . . . There, my lad!"

He roared with laughter again. Guillaume shook his head.

"You will not be happy," he said. "In your place, I should find a wife and come down here, to this peaceful retreat, where you can be sure of happiness. Listen—see what wonderful stillness surrounds us, just see how peacefully this oil lamp burns—like my whole life. Tell yourself what a life you could have in this perfect calm, if only in your heart there was a live affection, and you could see the days and the months and the years stretching before you, all equally tranquil, in which to satisfy it. . . . Find yourself a wife and come."

This notion of marriage and withdrawal into a sort of hermitage of love really put the cap on this comical notion for the retired surgeon.

"Heavens, what lover's temperament!" he cried. "He will insist on blinding himself to the fact that he's the only man on earth made like it." He looked across at Guillaume. "The trouble, my dear fellow, is that you're the first and last of your kind of husband. If I were to take a wife, for all that I'm not really a bad type, I should very likely be beating her at the end of a week. For Heaven's sake do understand that we have not all got the same blood in our veins. My dear boy, you have an idiotic respect for womanfolk. I certainly think they are exquisite treasures, but not the sort of treasures we ought ever to give ourselves indigestion with in domesticity. Were I to marry and retire to this place, I should be jolly sorry for the poor wench shut up in my company."

Guillaume shrugged his shoulders.

"You make yourself out blacker than you are," he said. "You

would worship your wife. As soon as she gave you a child, you would see an idol in her. Don't you make fun of my esteem for women like that and say it is silly. It will be all the worse for you, if you never know it. One should love but one woman in one's life, the woman who loves you, and both of you should live in such mutual love."

"I seem to recognize those sentiments," replied Jacques, a trifle sarcastically. "You said exactly the same one day down under the sallows. Get away with you, my boy, you haven't changed a bit, you get carried away just the same as you did then. . . . What can you do about it, I too am unchanged, and I still see love with different eyes. An eternal affair which lasted for ever would terrify me. I have always carefully avoided getting myself permanently attached to any petticoat, I contrive to have a spot of desire for every woman I see without loving one of them. My dear hermit, there's pleasure, you know, in mere enjoyment. . . ."

He paused a moment, then, in his bluff, cheerful fashion, demanded suddenly if his friend was really happy with his wife.

Guillaume, who had been just on the point of a speech in defence of his conception of everlasting love, was rather put out by this direct personal enquiry, but it certainly reminded him how much he really had enjoyed these four last years of happiness.

"I should think I am!" he said, with some emotion, "and very happy indeed, too. You just can't imagine how gloriously happy, since you refuse even to try it. Life is one continual lullaby. I have the impression that I have turned into a child again and found a mother. For four years my wife and I have lived in pure delight. I wish you had been here with us to learn how to love. This silence and shade which scare you have lulled us into a divine dream. What is more, my dear friend, we are never going to awaken from it, either, I feel quite confident of that, I have the foretaste of a life of unending peace."

While he had spoken, Jacques had been observing him with curiosity, and he now felt a keen desire to question Guillaume about his wife, about this good soul who had consented to submerge herself in such a mild, uneventful life.

"Is she pretty?" he asked, bluntly.

"I don't know," replied Guillaume. "I love her very much . . . you will see her tomorrow."

"You met her down here?"

"No. We met in Paris. We fell in love with each other. Then I married her."

Jacques had the impression that his friend blushed slightly. He had a faint suspicion of the truth. And he was not one to be embarrassed about asking questions.

"Was she your mistress, then, before you made her your wife?" he went on to enquire.

"Yes. For a year," Guillaume replied, frankly.

Without a word, Jacques rose and walked a few paces down the room. Then, coming back, he stood facing his friend, and said, very gravely: "Listen, in the old days, when I scolded you, you used to listen. Let me take on my old rôle of protector for a moment. . . . You've done a damn silly thing, old boy: people don't ever marry their mistresses. You don't know life. The day will come when you will understand your error, and recall what I'm saying. Marriages of that sort are very sweet, but they always turn out badly. You worship each other for a few years, then hate for the rest of your life. It's natural."

Now Guillaume leapt to his feet.

"That's enough!" he said, with sudden firmness. "I am fond of you, Jacques, I don't ask you to change, but I'm not going to have you judge us by other couples. When you see my wife, you will regret what you've just said."

"I regret it already, if that's your wish," said the retired surgeon, gravely. "Shall we put it like this: experience has made me sceptical, and I don't understand a thing in these matters of refinement of the tender feelings. I spoke just now as I feel. It's a bit late to give you advice. But the time may come when you'll find my hint useful."

A painful silence ensued. Then a maid entered to say that the blue room was ready. Guillaume thanked the girl with a kindly smile and held out his hand to his friend in a most friendly, warm manner.

"Let's turn in, my dear fellow," he said. "Tomorrow will be another day, and you will see my wife and little Lucie. . . . Get away with you, I'll convince you yet and marry you to some charming lass, and you will end up by burying yourself too in this old house. Good fortune is patient, it will wait for you."

Still talking, they made their way upstairs. When they reached the foot of the stairs in the hall, Jacques held out his hand to his old friend.

"Don't take what I said hard," he said, with a sudden show of

unexpected feeling. "I only wish for your happiness. . . . You are happy, aren't you?"

Guillaume did not reply till Jacques had begun to climb the stairs.

"I am happy," he said, with a smile, as if to end the matter. "Everybody here is happy. . . . At breakfast, then!"

When he returned to the dining-room, what should he find there but Madeleine, standing like a statue in the centre of the room. She had heard the whole conversation, everything the two friends had said. All this time she had been eavesdropping at the drawing-room door. Jacques' voice had held her transfixed. She had caught every phrase, recalling the gestures and head movements which must have gone with his words. The door between her and her former lover ceased to exist. She imagined him before her eyes, so alive, so vital, just as he had been when he first clasped her to his breast in that room in Soufflot Street.

The presence of this man so close at hand now brought her delight mixed with gall. His bursts of laughter stabbed her to the heart, and her body burned with those thrills which he had first taught her to know. With secret horror, she was drawn to him. She wished she could have fled, but she could not. Instead, against her will she felt a delight that he was alive again. A number of times she stooped, involuntarily, in an attempt to glimpse him through the keyhole, to revive the memory of him still more vividly. Those brief minutes that she stood there, all weakness, her hands pressed against the door, seemed an eternity of torment. "If I collapse here," she said to herself, "they will come in, and I shall die of shame." Some of the things Jacques said hurt her to the quick. When he declared that no man should ever marry his mistress, she even began to sob, stifling her tears, terrified lest they heard. That conversation and those plans of happiness of Guillaume's which she was now going to trample underfoot, those confidences which wounded her deep in her being, were unspeakable torment to her. She could scarcely bear Guillaume's gentle tones. Her ears were full only of Jacques' rough bass, thundering so menacingly across her serene skies. She felt thunderstruck.

When the two friends moved away to the foot of the stairs, she made a supreme effort, telling herself that this must be stopped at once. After what she had just heard, it would be impossible for her to accept the situation till morning came. Her straightforward character rebelled. She went back to the living-room. Her auburn

hair was unknotted, her face horribly pale, spasmodically twisted, her staring eyes like the dull, staring eyes of a madwoman. Astonished at finding her there, Guillaume ran to her, frightened by the state she was in.

"Madeleine, whatever is it?" he demanded. "You have not gone to bed?"

Lifelessly, she pointed to the drawing-room door.

"No," she said, "I was there."

She took a step towards her husband, laid her hands on his shoulders, looked him straight in the face with her cold eyes, said: "Jacques is your great friend, isn't he?"

"He is," Guillaume replied, astonished by the question. "You know very well that he is. I've already told you what a strong bond there is between us. . . . I count him as my brother, and I want you to love him as a sister."

The word sister brought a strange smile to her face. For a moment she closed her eyes. Then, still paler but more determined, looking him straight in the eyes again, she said:

"You dream of having him share our life, don't you? You would like him to come to live with us and always be at our side?"

"I certainly would," the young man said. "There you have my most precious desire. . . . I should be so happy with the two of you, I should have you for support and live my life between the only two people in the whole world who really love me. . . . In our youth Jacques and I once swore an oath we would share everything."

She gasped. "You swore that?" she muttered. Her husband's unwitting words had struck deeply home in her heart. Never before had the thought that she had given part of herself to Jacques, part to Guillaume, so nauseated her. She could not utter a word. Her throat seemed to close. Had she opened her lips, she could only have shrieked out the truth.

At this very moment, who should enter the room but Geneviève, unnoticed by either. The old housekeeper at once saw something was amiss. Erect, she waited in the deepest shadows, her burning eyes alight, her lips in constant speechless motion, as if in inaudible incantation.

From now on, throughout all Madeleine's confession which followed, the old woman was present, motionless, implacable, like a rigid, speechless figure of Fate.

"Why do you question like this?" Guillaume demanded, at last, instinctively alarmed now by his wife's attitude.

Madeleine did not reply at once. For some time longer she pressed her hands on Guillaume's shoulders, with merciless stare reading deep in his eyes. It was her hope that he might perceive the truth on her face, and she would not be thus obliged to declare her shame aloud. To confess on the spot cost her a terrible price. She did not know where to begin. But she had to make up her mind.

"I knew Jacques in Paris," she said, slowly.

"Is that all?" said Guillaume, not understanding. "How you frightened me. . . . Why, if you knew him in Paris, that makes him an old friend on both sides, that's all. . . . You surely don't think I am going to blush about you? Why I have already told him our story. I am proud of the way we first loved, then married."

"I say I knew Jacques," she repeated.

Her voice had grown more hoarse.

"Well, and what about it?"

Guillaume's blindness, his absolute confidence, were torture to Madeleine. He simply would not understand, forced her to be blunt. She could contain herself no longer.

"Look here," she suddenly cried, savagely. "It was you who begged me never to mention my past to you, and I obeyed your wish. And I had nearly forgotten it. But now look at what has happened! That past has risen from the void, to come crashing down on me, when my life here was so secure. But whatever the cost, I can keep silent no longer. I must tell you, so you will ensure that Jacques never sees me at all. . . . I tell you: I knew Jacques! Now do you understand?"

She slumped into a chair beside the fire. To him it was like a sudden cruel blow on the head. He held out his arms, as if to seize hold of something as he fell. His blood ran cold. The spasmodic fit of shivering which made his legs unsteady now shook him from head to toe. His teeth chattered with insistent beat.

"It was him. . . . Oh, you wretched girl, you wretched girl!" he cried. His voice faltered.

He joined his hands, as if in prayer. His hair at the temples stood out slightly, his pupils stared wide, his lips were white and quivering, his whole countenance was contorted in the poignant pain of this knowledge, as he seemed to crave Heaven not to strike at him so cruelly. He was more aghast than angry. This was the attitude he had assumed at school, when the others had attacked him and he had crouched in terror in a corner, wondering what sin he was expiating. In his bleeding heart he could not find a word of reproach

or insult which he might cast at Madeleine to ease his own pains. All he could do was stare at her in silence from wide-staring, pleading, childlike eyes.

Madeleine would have preferred him to strike her, for had he laid hands on her she would have been stung to rebellion, would have recovered her own vital force. But these despairing eyes of his and that attitude of passive suffering brought her breathless to her knees before him.

"Do forgive me," she stammered, as she grovelled there on the floor, sobbing, her hair tumbling over her face. Sobs shook her whole body. "Do forgive me, Guillaume. My darling, I have hurt you. Oh, how merciless God is. He is a jealous, implacable master and punishes his creatures. Geneviève was right to tremble before him and frighten me with His wrath. I did not believe her, it was my hope that Heaven did sometimes pardon. Heaven never pardons. I used to tell myself the past was dead, I could live in peace. The past was this man whom the ocean had swallowed. The waves carried him away, swept him into the depths of the sea, broke him against the rocks, and he vanished for ever, and with him my disgrace. Yet no, no, he comes to life again, he returns from the abyss, he and his loud laughter, fate casts him ashore and brings him to us to steal away our happiness! . . . Do you realize what I am saying, Guillaume? He was dead. Now he is dead no longer. . . . I could die, it is so stupid and so cruel. . . . No matter, Heaven never performs such miracles. Heaven took good care not to kill Jacques completely. Heaven needed this man coming back from the dead, to punish me. . . . What sin then have you and I committed? We have loved each other, we have been happy. We are punished now for our happiness. God does not want his creatures to live in peace. I would find it easier, could I but blaspheme. . . . Geneviève was right, the past and our sins never die."

"Wretched girl, oh wretched girl," Guillaume kept saying.

"But remember, how unwilling I was to accept the marriage you offered me! When you begged me to marry you, remember, that awful autumn day, at the spring pool all muddy from the rains, there was a voice crying out in me that I should not count on the mercy of Heaven. I said to you: 'Let us remain as we are, we love each other, that is enough, we might love each other less if we married.' And it was you who insisted and said you wanted to have me all to yourself, openly, completely. You spoke to me of a life of peace, you spoke of your esteem for me, of eternal affection, of sharing a home.

Oh, why was I not hard, why did I not heed that inner fear which warned me? You would have charged me with not really loving you, but like that I could have fled from Jacques, I could have vanished from your life without befouling this lifelong friendship of yours, without dragging you into the mire with me. I thought that by remaining your mistress, if ever you did come to think of me as a shameless woman, if ever we came up against my disgrace, you could then have driven me away like any loose girl and your loathing would have enabled you to forget me. I should once again be a lost woman, passing from one bed to another, one of those whose lovers turn them out the moment their disgrace brings a blush to their cheeks. But now, think, we have our little daughter. . . . Oh, darling Guillaume, do forgive me. It was so base of me to give way to you."

"Wretched girl, wretched girl," was still all that Guillaume could say.

"Yes, yes, it was base of me, but you ought to know why I did so. If only you knew how tired I was, what need for rest I had. . . . No, I am not going to make out I am any better than any other girl, though I do know I still had my pride. I yielded out of need for respect and a longing to heal the wounds done to my pride. When you gave me your name, I felt that you were washing me clean of al foulness. But it seems that the stains of filth are never washed away. . . . Though I did resist, did I not? I spent a whole night asking myself if it was not committing a base act, to accept your offer. The following morning I should have refused. You came while I was still asleep and you took me in your arms. I recall how your clothes smelt of the fresh morning air. You had come straight across by the field paths to be at my house sooner, and all my courage drained away. Yet that sleepless night I had seen Jacques and his ghost did tell me that I was always his and he would be present at our marriage and would enter our bedroom after . . . I rebelled against that, I wanted to prove to myself that I was free to act, and I was base, base . . . Oh, how loathsome you must find me, how right of you to detest me."

"Wretched girl, wretched girl," came Guillaume's low, monotonous voice.

"After that, I was just silly, I had the insolence to tell myself that I had done so well to be so base. For four whole years Heaven showed the cruel scorn of rewarding me for my evil action. Heaven wanted to be able to strike at me when I thought everything was at

peace, so the blow should be a mortal one. . . . In this very room I spent such tranquil days, and there were even times when it seemed to me that I had always lived here. When I kissed our child, I thought myself an honest woman. . . . What snug days, what kind caresses, what crazy affection, what stolen happiness! Yet, I had stolen it all—your love and your esteem, your name, our serene life, my child's kisses. I deserved no good at all, I deserved nothing worthy of honour. However did I fail to understand that it was just fate playing with me, that the day must come at last when those delights, which were not created for a woman of my sort, would be snatched from me? But I just settled down like a fool in all my happiness, in all I had stolen, till I began to think those happy days my due, and was simple enough to tell myself that they would last for ever. And now it has all come crashing down. Well, I suppose it is merely justice. I am indeed a wretched woman. But you, Guillaume, you should not suffer. I do not want you to suffer. Understand? I shall leave you now, you will forget me, you will never hear another word from me."

She collapsed into sobs, huddled helpless on the floor amid her petticoats, the tears glueing her hair to her cheeks. In the despair of this splendid body, its usual energy shattered by a single blow, there was also a sullen undercurrent of rage. She was humiliating herself, but nevertheless bursts of fierce anger still possessed her, and she sought the words with which to utter a fierce protest against her fate. Had her pride suffered less hurt, she would the sooner have been calm again. There was indeed only one single thought which thus kept her low—her pity for Guillaume. Turning her knees to one side, she sat up on the floor. While she had harangued him, her words torn staccato from her lips as if she had been delirious and dying, she had looked up imploringly at Guillaume, as if begging him not to leave her to face all her agony alone.

Guillaume was stupefied. He could not think. He just stared dully at her as she crouched there on the flagstones. He had still said nothing but "wretched girl, wretched girl" and the repetition of these words, while he rocked his head to and fro, made him seem like an idiot who did not even know any other words. But it was true, his poor, suffering body at the moment knew nothing more than this one cry. He was not even clear why he was suffering at all. He merely cradled himself in those self-pitying words, though their sense now eluded him completely. When, her voice choking from pain, his wife had stopped speaking, he suddenly seemed to be astonished by the

fact that not a sound was to be heard Then, with a gesture of unspeakable pain, he remembered.

"Yet all the time, you knew that Jacques was my friend, my brother," he said, at last, in an unrecognizable voice.

Madeleine nodded, with biting scorn.

"Yes, I knew it all. It was base of me, I tell you, base, infamous. Do you recall that day when we were living in Paris when you came back in tears? Bringing news of Jacques' death? Well, just before you came in, I had come upon his photograph. God is my witness that that morning when you came back, I had made up my mind to run away, to spare you the grief of having shared me with your brother. . . . But fate tempted me. Our life together has been one of Heaven's terrible jokes. . . . But when I thought that that past of mine was no more, when you told me that Jacques would never again appear between us, I was weak. I lacked the courage to sacrifice my gentle love for you and yours for me, an excuse, I told myself, by which it would be wrong for me to make you unhappy by parting from you. From that day on I lived a lie, I lived a lie by my silence. . . . Shame no longer choked me, and I should have kept the secret all my life and you might well have died in my arms without ever knowing that before you I had pressed your brother to my bosom. . . . Now if I embraced you, my embrace would stifle you, and our five years together make you feel sick. But see, I accepted all the loathsomeness of it. The fact is, I have been very bad."

She broke off, panting, sure she had heard a sound of movement. There was sudden terror on her strained features. The door into the hall had been ajar all this time and she thought she heard a footstep on the stairs.

"Sh!" she whispered. "It is Jacques—coming down again. . . . Don't you realize that any moment he might come and find us?"

With a violent start, Guillaume came to himself. As anxious as Madeleine, he strained his ears. For a moment they both leant forward, listening. Their own heart-beats deafened them. One might have thought that a murderer was there in the darkness of the hall, and that at any moment they expected to see him fling open the door and rush at them, knife in hand. Guillaume shook more than Madeleine. Now that he knew the truth he could not bear the notion of facing Jacques. The thought of having to have it out with him at once appalled his sensitive soul. This suggestion of Madeleine's that his friend might come down again after the terrible scene which had just exhausted him, was almost enough to send him out of his

mind. When, after some moments, he heard nothing, he turned back to Madeleine, and the sight of her like that there at his feet finally weakened him.

Instinctively, he suddenly slipped down between her arms. She clutched him feverishly to her. For a long time they wept together, as if they were striving to join themselves together for ever in this close hold and become so inseparably one that it would be utterly impossible for Jacques ever to separate them. Sobbing, his forehead on her shoulder, in the attitude of a child, Guillaume clasped his hands about her neck. By his tears, by this sudden collapse into her care, he was forgiving her, and his weakness told her that he did not think her guilty, it was fate which had done it all. "You see, I still love you," he was thus saying, "I do not judge you unworthy of my deep affection. Not another word about parting." And at the same time his weakness cried: "Console me, console me, take me to your bosom and cradle me there, to assuage my suffering. Oh, let me weep in your arms! How much I need the protection! I beg you, never leave me! I would die, were I alone, I could never bear the burden of such grief. Rather let me bleed under your blows than lose you. Dress the wounds you have caused me, be merciful to me now, soothe me with your love." And though he said not a word, Madeleine understood perfectly well what he was thinking. The sighs he kept suppressing told her all, and she could not but take pity on that highly-strung soul and console him. Indeed his absolute forgiveness, that unspoken mercy of his, all tears and kisses, had brought her tremendous solace. Had Guillaume spoken the words: "I forgive you," she would have shaken her head sadly. But he did not say a word to her, he merely yielded himself to her, and hid his face on her breast, shivering with fear and craving her succour and her love. So, little by little, she grew calm again, solaced herself by feeling him lost in her and so grateful to her for her enclosing arms.

She was the first to break away from the embrace. It was already an hour after midnight. They had to decide what they were to do.

"We cannot wait till he wakens," she said, avoiding to mention the name. "What do you mean to do?"

Guillaume looked at her with such a troubled face that she lost all hope of getting a satisfactory firm decision from him in such a state. However she went on:

"Were we to tell him everything, he would go away and leave us in peace. You go up and tell him."

"No, oh no," the young man stammered, "not now, later."

"Then would you like me to do it?"

"You?"

He was flabbergasted, so horrified by the thought that she should go and tell him. It was an impulse typical of her, but he failed to grasp the logic of her suggestion, he saw only what was monstrous in it. The mere thought of his wife being closeted with her former lover wounded his susceptibilities, tormenting him with ill-defined jealousy.

"Then what is to done?" she insisted.

He made no reply at once. He thought once again that he had heard footsteps on the stairs, and listened, pale with anxiety, as he had done in their first moment of panic. The mere thought of Jacques' proximity, the idea of his old friend's approaching him and holding out his hand, now caused him increasing pain. There was one thought and one only in his mind, that of flight, that of avoiding any explanation, that of taking refuge in some lonely place where they might hide. In difficult situations his character invariably sought time and also craved solely to resume further on his dream of peace. When he raised his head, it was to whisper:

"Let us go away. My head is bursting, for the moment I cannot see what to do. . . . He was only going to spend a day here anyway just now. . . . When he has gone, we shall have a month ahead of us to recover and make sure of our happiness."

But flight such as he suggested seemed repugnant to Madeleine, with her upright character. She saw too quite clearly that this settled nothing and would leave them with all their fears unrelieved.

"It would be far better to put an end to it," she insisted.

"No, come please," he whispered, pressingly. "We'll go over to the cottage to spend the night, and stay out there all day, till he has gone. . . . You know how happy we always were there. That cosy atmosphere will soothe us, we shall forget and love each other again just as we did when I used to steal out there to see you. . . . Were either of us to see him again, I feel that would be the absolute end to our happiness."

Madeleine made a gesture of resignation. She too was badly shaken, and she felt Guillaume was so upset that it was no use trying any longer to get a brave decision from him.

"Very well," she said. "Let us go. . . . Wherever you wish."

They looked all about them. The fire was out, the lamp was no longer giving more than a dim, yellowish glimmer. The huge dining-room, where they had spent so many snug evenings, stretched

gloomy, glacial, dismal. Outside, a powerful wind had risen, rattling the windows, and the winter storm outside seemed to be trying to get in, bearing away with it all the happiness and peace of the old mansion. Then, as they made their way to the door, in the shadows they saw Geneviève, erect, immobile, following their every movement with gleaming eyes.

Throughout this long scene of despair at which she had been present, the old woman had maintained her rigid, implacable attitude. She found savage delight in the sound of those sobs, those cries of their suffering bodies. Madeleine's confession had thrown open for her a world of passion and remorse, delights and griefs which had never disturbed her virgin body, and the sight of it made her dream of the cruel sport made with the condemned. She told herself that it must be like this that all those whom the fires of hell enwrapped with their greedy tongues of flame laughed and cried together. Her horror was intermingled with poignant curiosity, the curiosity of a woman grown old in hard toil without ever knowledge of a man, then suddenly hearing people talk intimately of love. There may even have been a moment in which she felt envious of these bitter delights of sin and the infernal fires now tormenting Madeleine's heart. One thing was clear: she had not been mistaken. This was a creature of Satan, whom Heaven had sent to earth for the perdition of men. She had watched Madeleine writhing, her hair falling loose about her, as she might have regarded the severed stumps of a snake destroyed and writhing in the dust. The tears which Madeleine shed were to her the tears of mortification of a demon finding herself unmasked. Those unpinned auburn tresses, that throat and those shoulders, so plump and so white, big with sighs, and those limbs shamelessly sprawing on the floor, seemed to her to fume, emitting a revolting, carnal stench. In Madeleine she beheld *Lubrica*, big-bubbed female monster, inviting arms all temptation, a foul whore, wrapping infected filth under the satin of a sensual, mother-of-pearl skin.

When Madeleine approached the door, Geneviève drew back a pace, to avoid being touched by her.

"Lubrica, Lubrica!" she ground out between her teeth. "Hell spued you forth and you bared your unclean nakedness to tempt the saint. Your red hair and red lips still glow with hell fire. You have bleached your body and your teeth in the braziers of the pit. You have grown fat on the blood of your victims. You are beautiful, you are strong, you are shameless, because you feed on human

flesh. . . . But one breath alone of the Lord will be enough to turn you to dust. Yes, Lubrica, accursed whore, you too shall perish like a carrion bitch fallen in the gutter!"

Guillaume and Madeleine could catch but few of the words which the old woman thus mumbled hysterically, like a prayer of exorcism, to protect herself against the attacks of the demon. They had thought everybody at *Noiraude* was in bed, and were taken by surprise and alarm to find her there. She must have heard everything. Guillaume was about to beg her to say not a word of all this, when she appraoched him, and in a hard, sermonizing voice demanded:

"Well, and what am I to say to your friend tomorrow? Am I to inform him of your shame?"

"Silence, are you mad?" he cried, in a sudden access of rage.

"But I think she is right," Madeleine said, "our absence will need some explanation."

"Then let her say what she will! I've had enough! Let her . . . let her say one of your relations has died suddenly, let her say we had an urgent call, and had to go at once."

Geneviève eyed him with grief on her face. She said:

"For you, my child, I shall tell the lie. But my lie will not save you from the torments you are preparing for yourself. Take warning! Hell has opened its gates, I have just seen the pit gape before you, if you continue in impurity you will without fail plunge to hell . . ."

"Silence, you are mad!" Guillaume cried again.

Madeleine withdrew from the fanatical old woman's fierce gaze.

"She is not mad," she stammered, "and you would do well, Guillaume, to pay heed to her. . . . Let me go away alone! I alone should take to the roads this winter night. Listen to the wind! . . . You stay here, forget me! Do not outrage Heaven by insisting on sharing my infamy!"

"No, I refuse to leave you," the young man replied, with sudden vigour. "We shall suffer together, if suffer we must. But I have hope, for I love you. Come, we will find peace, we shall be forgiven."

Then Geneviève's voice broke in, curtly ominous:

"God the Father does not forgive!" she declared.

These words, which she heard the Protestant maniac, like a prophet of ill, pronounce just before Jacques came, and now heard again as they were on the point of seeking oblivion, sent ice running through Madeleine's veins. All the strength which still held her, vanished. She swayed and collapsed against her husband's shoulder.

"Did you hear that?" she whispered. "God never forgives, never. . . . We shall not escape punishment."

"Don't pay any attention to this old woman," cried Guillaume leading her away. "She lies. Heaven is kind, Heaven has forgiveness for those who weep and love."

But Madeleine shook her head, repeating: "Never, never . . ."

Then there came a profound cry of anguish from her:

"Oh, those memories, they have been set loose again and they haunt me!"

They crossed the hall and left *Noiraude*. They were vaguely conscious how cruelly ridiculous such flight was. But so dazed were they from the sudden blow which had descended on them that they could not resist this instinctive reflex of the wounded animal, the instinct to take refuge in another hole. They were not rational beings as they left their home and fled from Jacques.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE night was pitch-dark, a dirty night, with raw cold. The wind, which had risen, was bringing gusts of heavy rain, Far away in the eerie darkness it howled lugubriously, shaking the trees of the park. The howling was like the wailing of human voices, like the hoarse cries of a crowd of suffering men. The sodden, water-logged soil gave under foot, as if their road were carpeted with loathsome filth.

Pressing close one to the other, Guillaume and Madeleine forced their way against the gale lashing at their faces with icy breath. From time to time they stumbled into potholes, splashing into deep water. Once outside the park, both instinctively looked back at *Noiraude*. A like thought in them both had prompted them to make sure that Jacques was asleep and there was no light in the windows of the blue room. But all they saw was the darkness, the dense black mass of the night. *Noiraude* might have been swept far hence by the storm.

Painfully, without a word, they lengthened their stride. They could not see the path at all. At times they plunged up to their ankles into soft ground. They knew the way to their cottage very well indeed, but the darkness was so absolute that it took them nearly half an hour to cover the half-mile. Twice they were completely lost. They were nearly there when a sudden squall caught them and soaked them to the skin, finally blinding them completely. Thus, when they did find themselves inside their retreat, they were plastered with mud, shivering, sickened by the mere odour of the mire they had had to plunge through.

They had great trouble getting a candle to light, before they locked the outer door and went upstairs. Here was that room in which they had passed so many blissful nights, and here they counted on recovering the snug serenity of their love. Opening the door of the bedroom, they halted, aghast: they had forgotten to close the window when they left the previous day, and the wind had driven in the rain; there was a large pool in the middle of the floor. They had to mop it up. The floorboards were sodden. Winter had made good use of its time since the day before, and was now well

established in their bedroom. Walls, furniture, everything was damp. Guillaume went down to look for wood. When they had got a big fire blazing in the hearth, they hoped they might at last get warm and find peace in the warm, still air of their seclusion.

Since they always kept some clothes at the cottage, they changed completely, then sat down at the fire. The idea of lying side by side in bed, still terrified and shivering as they were, and the bed in which they had passed such nights of burning love all cold, secretly repelled them. When at last the clock struck three, Guillaume said that he felt he would not be able to sleep at all.

"I'll sit the night out now," he said, "this chair will do me. But, Madeleine, you must be worn out, you go to bed."

With a faint nod of her head, she rejected the idea. They fell back into their former silence.

Outside, the storm was still raging, more violent, more savage than ever. Gusts of wind rushed at the cottage and rattled the windows and doors, like wild beasts. One might have thought it was a pack of wolves besieging the house and shaking it with their angry claws. At every fresh burst, the flimsy building seemed about to be swept away. There followed torrential downpours, which for a moment calmed the wind and maintained on the roofing the steady tattoo of funeral drums. These attacks of the storm were frightful to Guillaume and Madeleine: every shudder, every howl, filled them with vague terror. They became the prey to sudden alarms, straining their ears in the illusion that they had heard men calling to them from the road below. When a gust stronger than the others made every timber of the house groan, with sudden alarm they looked up and peered about them. Was this their dear place of refuge, usually so warm and sweet-scented? It seemed as if the furniture, the wallpaper, even the house itself had been changed. Uneasily and mistrustfully their eyes flickered from one object to another. Nothing seemed familiar, or, if it was, the memory it suggested worried them, hurt them. The thought even came to them that they had now tasted the height of enjoyment that they were to know here, and from now on the distant sense of that past enjoyment was to be gall to them. Once, speaking of the cottage, Guillaume had said that if misfortune were ever to strike at them, here they could always find oblivion and be well fortified against whatever oppressed them. But now that this terrible blow had struck them down and they had hurried here to take refuge, it was to find only the distressing ghost of their own love, so that they were

heavy with the evil which had now befallen them and burning regret for the years which were no more.

Gradually, however, they relapsed into a state of dismal collapse. The walk across the fields to the cottage through the mud, the wind and the rain, had calmed their fever, purging their heads of that congestion which had clouded their minds. Now the warmth of the fire began to fill their worn-out bodies with lead. As the glow penetrated their limbs, cramped with the damp cold, they felt their blood thicken, flowing with increasing difficulty. Less acute now, their agonized thoughts churned within them like slow-grinding mills. They were now conscious only of a dull burden they could not shake off. These inner wounds, bloodless but painfully raw, no longer hurt so acutely. Like any other exhausted person overcome with drowsiness, they slowly yielded to a state of stupor. They did not sleep a wink, but thought was now submerged in a sort of dull stupefaction, merely drifting on, sluggish now in the depths of their brains, a dim confusion of muddled, burdensome, ever changing ideas, all fraught with pain. They could not now utter a word without a feeling of unbelievable exhaustion. They just lolled in their chairs by the fireside, two dumb figures slumped there, and each might have been a thousand miles from the other.

When she took off her wet clothes, Madeleine had dressed merely in a single chemise, over which she had wrapped a long blue cashmere dressing-gown. The skirts of this, draping over either arm of her chair, bared her legs, gilded by the firelight. Half thrust into dainty mules, her feet assumed a soft pink hue in that bright glow. The upper folds of the *peignoir* lay open too, revealing her bosom, scarce hidden by the slip. She half sat, half lay in her chair, dreaming as she gazed at the glowing logs. One might have thought her totally unaware of her nakedness, insensitive even to the scorching caresses of that hot fire.

Guillaume observed her. He had gradually let his own head sink to the back of the armchair, and his eyes half closed. He was apparently dozing, but he was nevertheless keenly observing his wife, utterly absorbed in the spectacle of this half-naked woman. Her firm rotundities, however, now awakened in him no feeling but one of pained uneasiness. He felt no desire for her, but found her pose to be that of a mere courtesan, her expression the hard expression of a woman who has had all the sex she wants. On her countenance, the glare of the fire, falling from an angle, carved deep shadows, which the gleaming outline of forehead and nose

accentuated. Seen like this, her features stood out boldly and her whole face, silent and as it were petrified, acquired a suggestion of cruelty. Moreover, her auburn hair, still heavy with rain, falling in heavy masses down either cheek, framed her face in an unyielding line. That cold mask, that cadaverous forehead, those grey eyes, together with the fiercely red lips, unlighted by any smile, surprised the young man and filled him with uneasy astonishment, for in those features he could no longer find the face which he had been wont to see so smiling and so childlike. It was a new person revealing herself to him, and he examined every trait, in an attempt to decipher what thoughts these were which had so changed Madeleine. And when his eyes slipped lower, to her bosom and her bare legs, it was with something like fear that he stared at the yellow glare of the fire dancing over the flesh. The skin became more fair, but there were moments when one could have thought those were bloodstains that suddenly flashed over the round breasts and the full knees, vanishing again, only to come back once more to grain the frail, delicate skin.

Suddenly Madeleine bent forward and began to poke at the fire, only half awake, scarcely aware what she was doing. For a few moments she remained like that, bent low, her face nearly touching the flames, her long gown, nowhere fastened, slipping farther off her shoulders, half-way down her back.

Now, at sight of her powerful nakedness, Guillaume felt something clutch at his heart. He followed the supple but powerful stirring of that uncovered bosom, the flexible line of the down-curved neck and drooping shoulders. His eye thus followed down the curving spine, then passing under the arm circled her bust to where in the shade of the armpit a rose-hued nipple thrust forward. The whiteness of the skin, of that special milky white of Titian-haired women, made the black birthmark between neck and bosom stand out particularly. His eye halted in pain at that blemish, so often kissed by his lips. All this exquisite display of bosom, this mother-of-pearl skin and its soft rise and fall, with many a subtle and perfect shadow, stabbed his heart with unspeakable pangs. For out of the depths of his stupefaction memories were beginning to rise, not the bright clear flashes of things seen clearly, but sombre, slow-moving shapes, troubling his thought. The state of half-sleep into which he had sunk resulted in the same words coming back to him a hundred times over. He lived through a waking nightmare which he could not shake off, brooding over those five years of love which he had

passed in Madeleine's possession, and thinking of the many nights he had sunk into blissful sleep on that white breast. The sweetness of their embraces and kisses haunted him. In that timelessness, now over, he had yielded his whole being to her. His affection and his faith had been unstinted. Never then had it even occurred to him that he could be aught but her all to this woman. For did she not suffice completely to him, did all else in the world not vanish from his life when she lulled him to sleep between her breasts? Now he was the prey of frightful doubts. Picturing himself again kissing her silky shoulders, feeling her soft flesh quiver in ecstasy under his lips, he asked himself with rending heart if they alone had brought that deep response, or had she not come to his arms already warm, indeed still a-quiver from the caresses of another man? Having taken her to him in a state of absolute virginity himself, there was no question of his ever confusing his own enjoyment of her sex with any other past vivid sense of enjoyment. But Madeleine had not been ignorant of love as he had, and he now saw that when she fused with him in one body, she must surely feel stir again within her that surge of the heated blood which her first lover had taught her to know.

Of course, she could not but hark back to that other man too in her arms, and Guillaume went so far now as to persuade himself that she must feel a perverse pleasure in it all, with her past embraces playing an *obbligato* to her immediate union with him. What infamous, what cruel deceit it all was! While he thought himself her spouse, the only man she loved, perhaps he was merely a creature of chance, whose lips did no more than revive the sweet fire of those former kisses, still warm in her body. How was he to know that this woman was not deceiving him all the time with a ghost, using him as a mere instrument, the love-sick sighs of which recalled familiar tunes she knew of old, till he disappeared altogether, and in her heart of hearts it was with that other man that she coupled, and towards whom in all those many moments of the supreme spasm she had felt her gratitude well out. And this base farce had been going on these four years. For four years, without knowing it, he had indeed been playing a distasteful part, his flesh and his very soul filched from him.

With such reflections and such shaming reverie, prompted in his heart of hearts by the nightmare of his brain, he stared at this young woman's nakedness and felt profound revulsion, thinking on the white bosom and shoulders to detect outrageous markings, where

deep kisses had for ever ineffaceably marked the skin with suffusing blood.

Madeleine all this time kept stirring the fire. Her features maintained an impenetrable fixity. Little by little, each time she moved her arm to move the embers, her gown slipped farther from her shoulders, till now Guillaume became powerless even to look away from that body, with each spasmodic movement revealed to him more and more in all its shameless, superb plenitude. It seemed frightfully unclean to him. Every time the arms stirred, re-indicating the outline of the rich shoulder muscles, he thought he espied a lewd orgasmic leap of the flesh. Never had he suffered so. He told himself that he was not the only one who knew those hollows which formed on either side of her neck each time she brought her arms forward, and this notion of sharing her with another, of being at best the second string, became unbearable. Like all sensitive, highly-strung characters, he nursed in his heart a subtle sense of jealousy which leapt into response at a mere trifle. For him love had to be complete possession. This past life left him aghast because in Madeleine's memories he was now terrified of finding still other rivals, secret, new, intangible rivals, against whom he could never struggle. His imagination carried him away, filling his mind with horrible thoughts. To complete the agony, ill luck had ordained that Madeleine's first lover should have been Jacques, his friend, his brother. This was what tormented him most of all. He might have felt no more than exasperation about some other man, but against Jacques he felt an undefinable frenzy of impotent, painful rebellion. The former liaison of his wife with the man whom in his youth he had regarded as a god was to him one of those utter depths of baseness, the frightful nature of which it defied a man's mind to conceive. In this he saw incest, sacrilege. Jacques he forgave, though weeping tears of blood, thinking of him with ill-defined terror, as of somebody beyond his reach who, even though without knowing it, had dealt him a mortal wound and would never receive a like wound in return. It was however Madeleine that really concerned him, and in the over-excitation of evil thoughts which swelled every passing twist of disgusting fantasy to monstrous size, she seemed dead to him, dead for ever. By a bizarre shift of reality he saw her as Jacques' wife, whom it was wrong for his lips ever to touch again, and the mere thought of such contact made him feel sick. Her body repelled him. She now seemed a woman possessed by another, whom only love of debauch could have brought into his arms. Had she now

called him to her, he would have shrunk from her, lest he strike her down and kill her. And yet, in spite of all this, still he dwelt desperately on the agonizing sight of her uncovered form.

She had put the poker down. She had lain back again in the armchair. This change of position concealed her back, but revealed her bosom. She did not utter a sound. Her features were drawn. She had begun to stare unseeingly at a bronze goblet standing on the end of the mantelpiece.

The fact that Guillaume forgave Jacques did not lessen the hurt. His two great attachments had jointly let him down. It had pleased Fortune to make her cruelty worse by equally impregnating with it every bond of affection that he knew. Fortune had schemed a long time, with unbelievable finesse to concoct this plot which now ground him to nothing, body and spirit alike. Now he had nobody left to love. The fatal bond knotted between Jacques and Madeleine seemed so strong, so real, to him, that he charged them with adultery as if only yesterday they had slept together. With loathing, he tried to drive them from his memory, only then to find himself back in the chilly isolation of his childhood, all alone in the world. That brought back to his memory all his earlier suffering life. He felt Geneviève's terrifying breath sweep over his cradle, he saw himself back at school, bullied, and he recalled his father's violent death. How could he ever have been so foolish as to believe that Heaven could show mercy to him? Heaven had made mock of him by cradling him for that brief space in those dreams of peace. And just as he was beginning to find tranquillity, just when he was counting on a warm, affectionate life, Heaven had suddenly thrust him back into this dark, icy gulf, making his fall all the more atrocious. He had no doubts about it, this was a mortal blow; everything condemned him to anguish. His life-story, which he had thought cried to high heaven with injustice, was by this token but a logical tissue of reality. Yet he refused to allow things to crush him down like that, without rebellion against them. His pride revolted. The mere fact that he was cast back into this isolation, all by himself, was proof that he was better, more sensitive, of more delicate make-up, than other men. He knew how to love, whereas the mass of mankind only knew how to wound. These sentiments of pride were a consolation. In them he found real strength, which held him erect, preparing him to go on with his struggle against destiny. When at last this reassurance in his own decency came to him, he was a trifle easier at heart, and the sight of Madeleine's bare

shoulders awakened in him a mere backwash of scorn, mingled with a tender pity.

Madeleine was still lost in meditation. He began to wonder whatever could be passing through her mind, and now it was that idea which pained him. He strove in vain to read on her face what thoughts these were that kept her so silent, so limp. The truth is, Madeleine was not thinking about anything at all. Though her eyes were open, she was really half asleep. She was indeed absolutely exhausted. All she could hear was a muddled buzz of painful thoughts growing slowly calmer and calmer, within her.

Husband and wife remained as they were, silent, motionless, till day came. Not one word was uttered. A feeling of utter abandonment made the seclusion they had sought here seem overpowering. Despite the fire, scorching their legs, they each felt chill shivers run over their shoulders. Outside, the storm had begun to die down, with long-drawn-out, softer laments like the plaintive howling of some suffering animal. It was a night without end, one of those nightmare nights in which the soul cries in agony for a dawn which seems never to break.

But at last it came, a dirty, mud-bespattered dawn, and gathered strength with dismal slowness. First, the window-panes were blotched with the smoky light of a fog, then, little by little, the room seemed to fill with yellowish vapour, which flooded over the furniture without bringing more light, a steaminess bleaching the bluish wallpaper and fading it to a dirty colour, till one might have thought mud was trickling from it on to the carpeting. The candle had almost burned itself out. It showed pallid amid this cloudy air.

Guillaume rose and went over to the window. Squalid, loathsome, the countryside lay before him. The wind had now died down completely. The rain too had stopped. The flat land was transformed into a sea of mud and the sky, swept with low, tumbling clouds, had assumed the same greyish hue. It was like a vast, hazy gulf in which floated sodden trees, blackened houses, and folds of arable land soggy and furrowed with water, as if an insane hand had torn the whole skyline apart, to stir it into a monstrous medley of muddy water and brown clay. The dull daylight writhing over this miry expanse shed a dull, lurid glimmer of light, the drab dirtiness of which made one's gorge rise.

To those who have sat up all night, this turgid stage of a winter morning can be painful. Guillaume stared in pained stupefaction at the dirty sky-line. Waking up, he felt cold. He felt foul, physically

and spiritually. He might have been beaten up and just regaining consciousness. Madelcine, shivering just like him, weary, broken, joined him by the window and stared out at the fields. Seeing it all so deep in slush, she uttered a little cry of disgust.

"What endless mud!" she muttered.

"There has been an awful lot of rain," Guillaume observed, automatically making conversation.

There followed a brief silence, during which they remained at the window.

"I say, look," Madeleine suddenly resumed, "the wind has snapped off one of our trees. . . . And the rain has washed the soil of the borders on to the paths. . . . Just like a cemetery."

"It's this storm," her husband said, dully. "It has done a lot of damage."

They let fall the corners of lace curtain which they had drawn aside. They could no longer bear the sight of the foulness. With a sudden shudder, they huddled back, close to the fire. It was broad daylight now. The bedroom looked wretched. The lurid light seeping in through the windows seemed to dirty it all. Never had it looked such a dingy little room. Their hearts sank. They realized that this feeling of mingled disgust and tedium which seemed to haunt them was not merely caused by the dull sky, but also by their own misery, by the sudden collapse of their happiness. The grim future before them embittercd the present and tainted their past bliss too. They told themselves that they had been mistaken to come out here. They should have taken refuge in some completely strange house, where thcy would not have found the quick, cruel memory of their former delights. If this bed in which they used to sleep and the armchairs in which they used to sit no longer seemed to offer them their former warmth, the reason was that their bodies now chilled them. Everything in them was utterly dead.

However, despite all this, they gradually grew calmer. Madeleine drcw her dressing-gown about her shoulders and Guillaume emerged from his nightmare thoughts to attempt rather more calmly to assess realities. A prey to that fever of half-sleep which makes the slightest pain seem ominous, in his bad dreams he had lost his bearings, his mind running wild with horrible ideas, probing to the very bottom every base thought that came into his head, devoid of any reality. Now the morning chill drew him from his state of stupor. His mind struggled free from its visions. The banality of the petty details of life preoccupied him. He no longer saw

Madeleine in Jacques' arms, no longer tortured himself with fantasies about the strange adultery which had linked his wife and his friend in passionate liaison. Every detail resumed its proper place and the drama lost much of its painful reality. Now it was only in a very hazy way that he sensed the love of Jacques and Madeleine. This thing was in a distant past. It did not really worry him very much. His position began to seem quite bearable. He was back again in the daily run, he was Madeleine's legal husband, she loved him, and he was ready to fight to keep her for ever. Admittedly, the savage blow which had just made them both so desperate, still hurt, but its first sharp pangs were automatically dying away. His chilled body became less exacting in its demands, found it easy to pass over obstacles which had at first seemed disgusting and insurmountable.

In this fashion, Guillaume began to hope again. He turned to Madeleine with sad smiles. In her too the same transformation seemed to be going on. She however was still the victim of an incubus which stifled her and from which she could not entirely escape. Hope did rouse her, but that dead weight was still the stronger. She felt as if at heart she had a terrible lump, which would now always be there. The smiles she gave Guillaume were like those of a woman brought to her couch, already aware of the chill of death, only anxious now not to cause suffering to others.

They spent part of the morning beside the fire, talking quietly of one thing and the other. They avoided touching their sore places. The wounds were still open. They postponed the effort of making decisions. For the moment their only desire was to lull their pains to sleep. While they were talking, Guillaume suddenly had an idea. The day before, Lucie's nurse had come to *Noiraude* for her. She was to do the farm baking today, in which Lucie delighted, for she loved bannocks fresh from the oven. She never missed baking-day at the farm. Remembering that she must still be there, Guillaume suddenly felt a great longing to see her and have her between Madeleine and himself, like a symbol of hope and peace. In his anguish, he had all this time forgotten the child. It was a great relief to find this link between them. Was that little mite not a guarantee of the eternity of their union? It only needed one of Lucie's smiles to heal their wounds and prove to them that there was nothing in the world that could separate them.

"Madeleine," he said, "you should run across to the farm and fetch Lucie. . . . She might spend the day here with us."

Madeleine realized his thought. She too had forgotten all about the child. The mere name, on Guillaume's lips, made her profoundly happy. She was a mother, she would forget all this horror, even the lump which choked her.

"You are right," she replied. "Besides, we can't go without eating all day. . . . I can get some eggs and milk for breakfast." And she laughed, as if at a proposal for a delightful outing. She was saved, she told herself. It took her only a couple of minutes to slip on some clothes—a skirt, a wrap—and off she ran to the farmhouse.

Meanwhile, Guillaume brought a table up to the fire and laid it with a cloth. These preparations for a quiet breakfast here with his wife took his mind back to the happy days of their love, when she used to prepare meals for him here at the cottage. The room seemed at once to reassume that subtle charm of other days. It was snug, warm, perfumed. Telling himself that they were going to be very cosy and would spend a lovely day there, far from everybody, alone with their darling little Lucie, he forgot all the mud outside. The sombre, dull day now seemed merely an additional pleasure.

Madeleine was away a long time, but at last she appeared. Guillaume ran down to meet her and take the milk and bread with which she was loaded. Even Lucie was carrying something—yes, a huge bannock, which she was clutching to her bosom.

Little Lucie was now three and a half, and a very big girl for her age. Her rather short, chubby little legs gave her the air of a real little country lass, reared in the open air. Fair like her mother, she had a delightful smile, which softened the lines of her somewhat hard little face. Advanced mentally for her age, she chattered away the whole livelong day, already imitating grown-ups, with questions and answers which made her parents laugh till they cried. When she caught sight of her father at the foot of the stairs, she cried: "Take me, carry me."

She would not let go her pasty, and at the same time she was afraid to climb the stairs without holding on to the balusters. Delighted to carry her, and all smiles, doting on her, Guillaume took her under one arm. The warm little body pressed against his shoulder thawed him through and through.

"Just think," cried Madeleine, "this young lady was still in bed, and it took me a good quarter of an hour to persuade her to come with me at all. She says they promised to bake her some apples today. I had to bring a couple in my pocket and promise I would bake them here in front of the fire."

"I'm going to bake them," cried Lucie. "I know how."

As soon as her father set her down in the room, she clung round Madeleine till at last she had succeeded in slipping her hand into the pocket of her mother's skirt, whence she extracted the two apples, to prick them with the point of a knife and solemnly squat down at the fire with them. Parting the ashes, she cleared a patch of hearthstone and put the fruit down on it, then drew away, but without once taking her eyes off them. The big bannock lay on her knees.

All this Guillaume and Madeleine watched with smiles. Lucie had all the little mannerisms of a busy housewife, and they found it delightful, they had such tremendous need for the child's innocent play, to recuperate them from the shocks they had received. They would have liked to play on the hearth too, just to forget, and persuade themselves that they too were tiny and innocent like her. Lucie's infant's peace of mind, the odour of freshness which emanated from her, made them feel sentimental again and wrapped them in healing peace, and they hoped and persuaded themselves that the future was going to be tranquil and clean. The future was this darling child, this little angel of peace and purity.

They had sat down at the low table and now ate heartily. They even plucked up courage to speak of tomorrow, making plans already picturing their little daughter grown-up, married and happy. The child had completely dispelled that memory of Jacques.

"Your apples will burn!" cried Madeleine, with a laugh.

"Oh, but no, they won't," replied Lucie. . . . "I'm going to toast my bannock now."

She looked up at her mother with serious mien, which suddenly aged her infant face. When Lucie stopped smiling, her lips became firm, almost hard, and she frowned slightly. Guillaume too watched her. Then, suddenly, he began to lose colour, and with growing apprehension peered at the child more closely.

"But whatever is the matter with you?" demanded Madeleine, anxiously.

"Nothing," he said.

But he went on contemplating Lucie. He could not take his eyes off her. Then he suddenly leant back in his chair, as if to escape some sight which horrified him, and on his countenance there appeared a terrible expression of restrained suffering, which he was trying to repress. He even made a vague gesture, as if to brush little

Lucie aside. His pallor frightened Madeleine. She could not understand what it was that had suddenly gripped him so. Thrusting the table out of the way, she sat down on the arm of Guillaume's chair.

"Tell me," she said, "we were so happy . . . just now. You were all smiles. . . . Guillaume darling, I thought all our happiness had returned and we had started a new life. . . . Whatever is the matter? Tell me what black thoughts have just come to you, and let me drive them away and mend whatever it is. I want to see you happy."

He shook his head. Suddenly a shudder ran through him.

"Look!" he cried. "Just look at her, look at Lucie!" He whispered, as if afraid of being overheard.

Solemnly holding out her bannock on a fork, to toast it, the child was still squatting on the floor in front of the fire. Her lips were pursed, and she was frowning. She was utterly absorbed in her task.

"Why? What?" Madeleine asked.

"You don't see it?" cried Guillaume in a voice which was stranger still.

"I can see nothing wrong."

Guillaume hid his face in his hands and burst into tears. Then, with a visible effort, he stammered:

"She is . . . like . . . him!"

Eyes wide open with horror, Madeleine stared at her child with a sudden anxiety which made her tremble like an aspen-leaf. Guillaume was absolutely right: Lucie was vaguely like Jacques, and the resemblance became striking when the child pursed her lips and frowned, for this was a frequent state of expression on the materialistic surgeon's face. But for a while Madeleine refused to admit the terrible truth.

"You are mistaken," she whispered back. "Lucie's just like me. We should have noticed it long ago, if what you say were really so."

She carefully avoided mentioning Jacques' name, but, close to him as she was at that moment, she could not prevent Guillaume feeling her shiver.

He insisted:

"But she is, I am not mistaken. . . . You can see very well that she is. . . . She's growing up now. Soon she will be the image of him. I myself never saw that solemn expression on her face till now. . . . I shall go mad!"

He was really getting quite worked up, wiping away the sweat which was suddenly pouring from his temples, then pressing both

hands to his forehead as if to prevent his head bursting. Madeleine dared not utter another word, merely leant limp against his shoulder, all the time staring at the child, who was totally unconcerned with what was passing between her parents. Her two apples were sizzling away and her bannock was steaming hard and assuming a lovely golden hue.

"So your thoughts were on him, were they?" demanded Guillaume, in hollow tones.

"My . . . my thoughts. . . ?" stammered Madeleine.

She knew very well what he meant. He thought she had been thinking of Jacques in the instant in which, in Guillaume's embrace, she had conceived Lucie. The young man's nightmares were wakening again in his scattered brain, his thoughts once again occupied with the peculiar moral adultery of which his wife could not but have been guilty as she allowed her imagination to accept her husband's kisses as those of her first lover. Here was the origin of the resemblance of the child to that man. In this instant Guillaume had obtained his proof. Now he could no longer have any doubts about the despicable role he had allowed himself to play. His child was not his, it was the fruit of the disgraceful union of Madeleine with a ghost.

When from his mad eyes Madeleine grasped what he was charging her with, she pleaded with him.

"But what you say is outrageous," she said. "Do come to your senses, don't make me out worse than I really am. . . . I never once thought of him when I was with you."

"Lucie is like him," Guillaume insisted, mercilessly.

Madeleine wrung her hands.

"I can't tell how it can be," she said. "Fate is destroying me. . . . But no, Guillaume, no, no, I never did what you suggest I did. That would be foul."

Guillaume shrugged his shoulders. He had all the brutal stubbornness that suffering lends. The notion that Lucie's similarity to the first lover of the mother was a fairly common fact, dependent on certain physiological processes which are still unknown, was beyond his power of thought in such a painful moment. He stuck to the savage explanation which caused him such anguish. But against this idea, Madeleine's whole being rebelled. She would have given anything to convince him of her innocence, but she realized with horror that it was not in her power to offer him any proof. It was her thoughts that he accused. All she could offer against such a

charge was protest and assurances on her honour that she spoke the truth. For some minutes they were both silent, both stifling sobs and cries of anguish.

"Oh look, look!" cried Lucie suddenly, "my apples are baked!"

Up to this moment the child had been utterly absorbed in her task, tongue-tied at the sight of apples baking and bannock toasting. Now she stood up and clapped her hands, then, taking a plate from the table, laid her apples tidily upon it. But they were still so hot that she had to wait, so she squatted down on the floor again, watching them steam, but so eager to eat them that from time to time she had to put a finger to them. But when at last they seemed fit, she suddenly felt a misgiving. Perhaps it would be polite to offer them to her parents. There was a brief struggle between selfish desires and generous heart. Then she ran to her Daddy with the plate.

"Daddy, do you want a baked apple?" she enquired, in a wavering little voice which clearly hoped he would say no.

All this time from the moment she started this cooking, Lucie, busy little cook, had not once looked up. Now, suddenly seeing the tears in her father's eyes, she stared aghast at him, and in an instant was all seriousness. She put down her plate.

"You's crying," she said. "Have you been naughty?"

She went across to Guillaume, laid her little hands on his knees and raised herself on tip-toe, with the obvious idea of using an arm of the chair to climb up to his face. The sight of her parents so sad alarmed her not a little, and she did not know whether to laugh or to burst into tears too. For a moment she stood there, worried, looking up at her father with an expression of tender sympathy. Then she held out her hands to him.

"Take me," she cried, in the special little wheedling voice she knew how to assume.

But he merely stared at her, leaning back, paler than ever, shivering all over. How like Jacques she was, especially when grave like this! Her little hands seemed to burn his knees. He wanted her out of the way, not to torment himself any more, studying her every feature. But Lucie had a clear idea what she wanted. This was to put her arms round her Daddy's neck and comfort him. At the same time, she was beginning to feel rather frightened, and would have had nothing against taking refuge in his arms. And when she had asked him to pick her up a number of times and saw he had no intention of doing so, she tried to clamber up, and had

already succeeded in raising herself up on her elbows, when Guillaume completely lost his head and suddenly thrust her from him, with some violence. The child staggered, then fell back, landing with a bump on her bottom. The carpet softened the fall. She did not even cry at once. She was so astonished that she merely stared at her father, with terrified surprise. Again she knit her little lips and frowned, exactly like Jacques.

Seeing the child fall, Madeleine rushed to her. The little one's head had nearly hit the edge of the fireside table.

"Oh, Guillaume!" she cried. "You are cruel! I did not know you were so evil. . . . Take it out on me, if you like, but not on this poor child."

She clutched Lucie to her bosom, and now the child cried, sobbing desperately, as if Guillaume had struck her hard. In fact, Lucie had come to no harm, but it was enough to be pitied, for her to think it her duty to scream her head off, while her mother strode up and down, with her in her arms, trying to soothe her, telling her it was nothing, telling her it was all well again, kissing her little cheeks noisily.

Guillaume was at once stabbed by remorse for his brutality. Indeed, the instant he saw Lucie staggering away, he himself had begun to sob with mingled shame and grief. Had he then now come to the murder of little children? His gentle nature was outraged by the mere thought, and he felt the pangs which made him so touchy and so rough more fiercely than ever. At the thought that little Lucie's head might have crashed against the corner of the table, he felt his blood chill, as if he had indeed been a murderer. At the same time, little Lucie's sobs exasperated him and Madeleine's kisses seemed monstrous. It even came into his mind that as she kissed the child she must feel she was kissing Jacques. This last fantastic notion was the last straw. He flung himself broken on to the bed and hid his head in a pillow, to see and hear no more, and from now on lay there, utterly defeated, without stirring.

But sleep did not come to him. Despite himself, he could hear Madeleine prowling about. Though his eyes were closed, his night was shot with lightning flashes constantly revealing those pursed-up lips of his child, those tight-knit lips, that frowning brow. Never again would he be able to bring himself to kiss the infant face, which at instants could assume all the gravity of a grown man. Never, without frightful suffering, would he be able to see his wife fondle that fair head. He had no daughter now, there was no longer

any living bond between him and Madeleine, and his last hope of salvation had been transformed to supreme pain. From now on it would be silly even to try again to achieve happiness. Like a death-knell these thoughts clanged in his head, unhinged by suffering, till at last despair wore him out completely, and he slept.

When he wakened, it was still pitch dark. He got up, all aches and pains, wondering what could have made him so utterly exhausted, and then, all at once, it came back to him, and again he suffered, but now with a suffering which was indeed grim. The crisis was over, all he felt now was dull, hopeless exhaustion. There was no candle lit, only the yellowish glimmer of the hearth to light the room with its ponderous shadows. He caught sight of Madeleine. She lay stretched out in one of the armchairs, beside the fire. Eyes wide open, she was staring fixedly at him. Lucie was no longer there. Madeleine must have taken her back to the farm. Guillaume did not ask. He seemed to have forgotten she existed.

"What is the time?" he asked his wife.

"Eight," she replied, calmly. There was a brief silence.

"Have you slept?" he asked, again.

"Yes, a little."

It was true, Madeleine had gone off for a few minutes. But what an endless, crushing afternoon it had been. She had gone through terrible moments between these four walls where formerly she had slept so peacefully. She was resigned now. How to combat her fate she had no idea. "I shall kill myself tomorrow, if it has to be," she told herself, and the certainty of being able thus to escape shame and suffering, if she wished, almost completely restored her peace of mind. She spoke in a hushed voice now, like a woman, dying and resigned who, seeing that things can never be worse than they have hitherto been, surrenders herself to her fate as a relief.

Guillaume walked up and down for some moments, then drew the curtains from the windows. It was brighter outside. Across the fields he could see the dark mass of *Noiraude*. Only the ground-floor windows were lighted. Jacques must have left. He went up to his wife, still seated by the fire. He seemed to weigh things up for a moment, hesitant, then at last he spoke.

"We'll go to Paris for a month."

She showed no astonishment, hardly looked up.

"We'll leave in an hour's time," he went on.

"Very well," was all she said.

What did it matter to her whether she went to Paris or stayed

at *Noiraude*? Would her running sore not bring her the same pain wherever she went? She realized that Guillaume wanted to avoid seeing Lucie for a time, and she approved of this search of oblivion. Indeed, a moment later this thought of going away somewhere awakened in her a faint hope of healing her sores. Her first acccptance of the idea was entirely passive, but a few moments later she seized on the idea as a last chance of achieving salvation.

When they locked the door of the cottage, something clutched at both their hearts. They had rushed here to find the peace of their old love, but they had now left the place, more shattered than ever. They had merely sullied their memories, and would never be able to go back there to pass a happy day, and they now asked themselves where this wind of misfortune which was lashing at them would eventually cast them.

At *Noiraude*, they learned that Jacques had left only about half an hour earlier. They dined rapidly, scarcely touching anything. Geneviève did not say a word to them, only glowered at Madeleine. When nine o'clock struck, Guillaume had the brougham brought round. It was too late to take the train, and his crazy brain had now conceived the idea of driving all the way to Paris. It had occurred to him that the silence of the dark, deserted highways might calm his soul. He told Madeleine to dress warmly, and a few minutes later they were out on the Mantes road.

CHAPTER NINE

It was stingingly cold. Last night's gale had cleared the sky of cloud and it was freezing hard. The moon, at the full, lighted the whole sky with the bluish glint of polished steel. In that universal glow, translucent as chill spring water, every detail of the countryside stood out, all the way to the very skyline. Seized in mid thaw, the fields looked as if the frost had caught them still contorted by the storm. Ribs of upland stood out rigid between expanses of frozen mud. The land was like a corpse caught by death, convulsed in its final throes. The smallest twig stood out black, the smallest stones of the walls glinted whitish, blotches of crude colour plastered on an immense uniformly grey ground.

The brougham which Guillaume had selected was a two-seater with a collapsible leather hood, which some time back he had bought for them to make trips about the country with, when he preferred to go without a coachman and drive himself. On the narrow seat there was indeed only room for himself and Madeleine. As he urged the horse to faster gait with flicks of the whip he was conscious of his young wife's legs pressing warm against his own. How often they had been out in that little vehicle, finding the way it jolted them against each other terribly funny. Tonight it bowled over the highway with monotonous bumping. Against the vast silence of the ice-bound fields the only sound of which husband and wife were conscious was the regular, metallic click-clack of their horse's hooves on the frozen road. Their two head lamps reached out yellowish fingers of light on to the road, with its thin coating of rimy ice. The cones of illumination raced ahead, picking out the ditches on either side with jerky bounds. The moonshine thinned their light away. They were dim like candles lighted in early dusk.

Over their knees, Guillaume and Madeleine had drawn a thick grey rug. Reins in hand, he was taciturn, opening his mouth solely to give the horse an occasional sharp word of encouragement. Madeleine in her corner seemed asleep. Enveloped in furs, her feet warmly wrapped in the rug, her hands too tucked in, she felt the cold only on her face. This brisk air pricking at eyes and lips was rather pleasant. It kept her awake, soothing her hot forehead. Her eyes

automatically followed the carriage-lamp cones of lights as these bounded ahead of them. Her mind was lost in thoughts which leapt jerkily ahead too. As she thought of all she had just gone through, she was amazed. However had she come so to lose her head? As a rule she was governed by her resilient, unswerving will. Her imagination was cold, her senses left her untroubled. One minute of clear thought would probably have been enough to master the whole situation, yet she who was always so sensible all at once lost her head. There could be no doubt about it, it was Jacques who had caused her thus to lose control. But she could not understand why he should have proved to be so much alive in her veins, why his resurrection should so have upset her. Flitting from one detail to another, she sought an explanation of this, but got lost in the obvious contradictions of her own nature. In a vague way, deep within her, she was aware of the truth stirring, but the reactions she found in herself were so unexpected that she recoiled from them.

When Madeleine had lost her head first in Jacques' arms, her virginal body had assumed that vigorous young man's ineffaceable imprint, and it was then that there had taken place an inward marriage which was indestructible. At that moment her sap was rising in full flow. She was at that stage of life at which a woman's body ripens, and the mere contact of a man impregnates. Her powerful body and her even temperament were the more profoundly penetrated by Jacques' full-bloodedness and healthy vitality. It was with all her serenity, all her frankness, that she had yielded her flesh to that flow of bodily essence from her lover into her. This being so, her cold temperament had merely proved an additional cause, making the possession of her entire self the more complete and more lasting. One might put it that when he crushed her to his bosom Jacques moulded her according to his image, giving her his muscles and his bones, making her his for life. Chance had tossed her into this man's arms, chance still held her in his grasp, and while he held her there, despite the chance nature of their union, ever on the point of being widowed by him, she was bound more and more closely to him by ineluctable physiological forces, her flesh filled with him. When, after a year of this occult shaping of the blood and the nerves, the surgeon did leave her, what he left behind him was a young woman stamped for ever with the mark of his kisses, possessed to such a point that she was no longer merely mistress to his body, but in herself bore another being, those male essences

which had completed her and in that new shape consolidated her. It was a purely physical process at work.

Today, the bond of affection was broken, but the bond of the flesh was knotted as tightly as ever. If her heart no longer loved Jacques, the fatal memory of her flesh was unchanged. She was his for ever. In vain had the love emotion faded out, the bodily effect of that possession had thereby lost none of its potency. The marks of the liaison which had made a woman of a girl had survived her love. Even though all she now felt for him was a dull hatred, she was still Jacques' wife. Guillaume's caresses, five years of other embraces, had never sufficed to purge her limbs of the man who had first entered there, to take her puberty. She was shaped, fashioned by the male, for all time, and a crowd might have tried in vain with their kisses to fade out those first kisses she had known. Her husband possessed merely her heart. Her body was no longer to be given, she could only lend it.

Yes, since her marriage, it had all been but a loan. Of this she had living, undeniable proof. Little Lucie was like Jacques. Even though he had engendered this daughter of Madeleine's, Guillaume had been powerless to give the child his image. Though he had fecundated, it was the woman who had given the child her features, and they were those of the man whose imprint she herself bore. There could be no doubt about it, Jacques' blood was largely responsible for Madeleine's pregnancy. He was still the primal father, he was the one who had transformed the virgin into spouse.

What was more, Madeleine had been well aware of her enslavement that day when Guillaume proposed to her. She was not free, instinctively repulsive forces roused her flesh against the very idea of a new marriage, in which she would never be able to give herself. Despite her intentions, a clear rejection came first to her lips. Her affections had been astonished by her own refusal. Did she not love Guillaume? Had she not been living with him then for the previous year? But she refused then to give ear to this cry of her flesh, this revolt of the blood, warning her, reminding her that though she was quite free to take a second lover, she was not free at all to bind herself entirely to any other man than Jacques. And now she was weeping tears of blood for not having heeded that cry of her enslaved flesh.

Here she had to do with so inward a phenomenon, one so deep with strangeness and terror, that she still refused to accept such an explanation of her rebellion. Had she been sure she was thus

possessed for ever by a man whom she did not love, she would have gone out of her mind, and rather flung herself under the wheels of the brougham in sheer fear of the frightful suffering which lay in wait for her. Were that true, it meant that she would always have the misery of bearing a body thus enslaved, would never cease to feel within her that hated blood-flow of Jacques, would never be able to forget herself in Guillaume's embrace without the thought that the act was prostitution. Indeed, she was totally ignorant of this fatefulness of our flesh which can bind a virgin to her first lover so closely that she is never after able to break off that casual marriage, but obliged for ever to accept the husband of a moment, or else commit lifelong adultery. To calm her mind, she now dwelt on these four years of peaceful affection which she had just spent. But yet she did realize that Jacques had never left her system, merely slumbered within her, hence one instant had been enough to restore him in all his powerful vitality.

Here had been the cause through which so steady, so strong-charactered a woman as Madeleine had all at once lost her head. The only force which could upset her unswerving levelheadedness and bring to fever senses which in her normally slept, was Jacques. His hand was on her bowels and the sound of his voice, even the mere memory of him, threw her at once into a state of surexcitation. When he reared up, alive, before her, she simply lost her head and she was bound to do the same again every time that she felt him suddenly stir within her. This sense she now had that peace was never to be hers again, alarmed her particularly. Usually so sure of her own cold temperament, she thought of the love shudders which had gone through her the day before and she was both afraid and disgusted. The thought that such feelings might once more burn her with shame, if ever she came across Jacques again in future, distressed her greatly. Even the horror which epileptics feel at the thought of future bouts of their disease could not be more repulsive than what she felt. She was indeed like an epileptic, with the chill at heart, and the deep depression, which they still feel from the repulsive convulsions which have taken possession of them.

Not that Madeleine, slumped in the corner of the brougham, watching the yellow glimmer of the carriage lamps leaping and bounding before her on the road, thought these thoughts clearly. On the contrary, she shrank from any precision of mind. Her mind was lost, beset with questions she did not want to answer. She was worn out, and she put off probing her conscience till later, when she

told herself that she would take vigorous measures against it all, she would struggle. She merely dwelt on it all at this moment because she could hardly help doing so. It was indeed no more than a hazy, spasmodic reverie, while the swaying brougham lulled her to sleep. She could indeed have blissfully forgotten the world entirely, had it not been for that brisk night air stinging lips and eyes. She peered ahead, over the horse's ears, and saw the landscape stretched out, rigid and frozen, lifeless as a corpse under the white shroud of the moon, and the harshness of those dead outlines started new reveries about the bliss of the eternal void.

Guillaume thought Madeleine was asleep. He drove automatically, ears intent on the night silence. The deserted turnpike and this dry cold which soothed his fever made him happy. Ever since they left, Jacques' words had been ringing in his mind: "A man should never marry his mistress." He could not tell what had wakened that pronouncement out of the depths of his memory, but it forced itself on him with singular tenacity, and he turned it over and over, debating it. Secretly, it frightened him, for all that he refused to accept it as an inevitable law of life by which to be guided.

The stupid notion of trying to redeem a sinful woman had never been his. Marrying Madeleine, it had never occurred to him that he was rehabilitating her, or, as the catchphrase has it, by reason of his respect and his love "restoring her virginity" to her. He had married her because hc loved her, that was all. He was far too sensitive by nature, far too closely and egotistically governed by his feelings, ever to get entangled in stupid moralistic considerations. It was his heart which had prompted him, not his mind which had set him a task, which anyway his utter lack of control of body or mind would have made it beyond him to even try to accomplish. Of course he regretted his dear one's past and would have liked her to forget it, but that was from selfish reasons, by reason of a temperamental revolt which made it unbearable to him to think he did not possess her entirely. It is only young idiots or old men tired of everything who sometimes propose to themselves to redeem a soul. Guillaume was a novice in living, yes, but he certainly did not get engulfed in any such false idcalistic heaven, He had never for a moment thought that Madeleine was in any need of being saved. All he was concerned with had been to be loved himself, the only thing in the world that he could perceive to be lacking being his own requirement of absolute, eternal affection. But even had the dream

of a work of rehabilitation come to him, the idea would not have halted him, for to him it would have been obvious that love of itself washed away any stain.

The consequence was that Jacques' pronouncement really remained incomprehensible to him. Why should one not marry one's mistress? On the contrary, to him it seemed sane enough to find complete repose between the arms of a woman one both knew and worshipped. The nightmares of the previous night alone could not efface that conviction. If he had suffered, it was by a cruel trick of chance. He felt that Madeleine still loved him and he had no regrets about having married her. He had but one persistent thought —that he should be a still better husband to her, tenderer, more understanding, now that she wept. He had no more thought her to blame than he thought himself unwise. It was a misfortune which had struck at them, they had to become more united still and find consolation in each other's arms, and then their mutual affection would rescue them.

Thus his personality, for a time rigid from pain, gradually relaxed in new hopes. Extreme pain brought its own reaction, which threw him on to Madeleine's bosom with the longing to find refuge there, shelter from the wounds which the outer world gave him. At his side he still saw only a woman whose embraces could bring him oblivion of the ills of life. Forgetting that she was the cause of this anguish he had just suffered, he dreamed that in her he would now find the heights of bliss, joys powerful enough to absorb his whole being and render the rest of the world as nought. What did they need? A hidden nook where they might burrow together, out of sight, in their love for each other. He allowed his thoughts thus to drift in this dream of a life apart, that dream which he had nurtured since childhood, now seeming sweeter than ever in proportion to these cruel blows fate levelled at them. His requirements of peace increased, his longing to keep Madeleine's love turned to sheer weakness, till there were moments in which, even if she had struck him herself, he would have clung to her neck and begged her to wipe away his tears. And yet there were still moments when his inner pride flared up and, holding him distant from her, forced his mind to dwell on the isolation of his heart, and his super-sensitive, nervous love condemned him to utter loneliness, lost in unassuaged craving for ultimate serenity and absolute love.

As thus he mused on the new life they were going to live in Paris, Guillaume felt Madeleine's body pour more and more warmth

into his. Under the grey rug their feet interlaced, and this touch of her young body counted for much in the dream of peace and affection which once again he was building up. Though he did not know it, his hopes were born of his enjoyment at finding her so close to him. She kept him warm, while their vehicle rolled on incessantly through the icy night, lost in the great peace of winter.

They were drawing near Mantes, and had not uttered a word since Véteuil, each lost in reverie, eyes far-off on the sheets of white luminosity which the moon spread over the upturned land about them. Passing a house which bordered the road, a dog suddenly began barking, so miserably that a shiver passed through Madeleine.

"Asleep, darling?" Guillaume asked her.

"Yes," she murmured, feeling that her long meditative silence must have been hard for him to bear. "That dog woke me. . . . Where are we?"

With his hand he pointed to the outline of roofs, bluish on the horizon.

"That's Mantes," he said, and flicked his whip at the horse. In the same instant, a woman who had been sheltering behind a hedge suddenly ran down to the road and made towards the brougham. When she reached it, she clung to one of the head-lamps and thus followed beside it, at the run, shouting something confused, which they could not hear, for the noise of the wheels.

"It's a beggar," said Madeleine, leaning out and seeing how poorly the woman was dressed.

Guillaume tossed down five francs. The woman caught the coin in flight, but still did not at once let go of the lamp. When Madeleine had leant out, she had gasped, and now was staring, strangely persistent.

"Let go there!" Guillaume shouted to her. He felt Madeleine shiver under the poor creature's stare. And when the woman at last did let go, he turned to his wife to assure her it was indeed only a beggar.

"I'm not afraid," said Madeleine. Yet she was still shaking. "But whyever did she stare at me so? I could not see her face because of those rags round her throat. It was an elderly woman, wasn't it?"

"Yes," he said. "Somebody told me something the other day about a girl from these parts who went to Paris to make her fortune and came back recently, half crazy. . . . This may be her."

"How old would she be?"

"Really, I don't know. . . . Why, do you think she knows us? She was only hoping to get another five-franc piece."

Madeleine said no more, yet still felt vaguely uncomfortable about the way the beggar had stared at her, and she leant back to look behind them, and then she saw the beggar-woman was still running behind them. This filled her with real terror, but she had not the courage to talk to Guillaume about the woman again.

The brougham was now entering Mantes. Guillaume had a pleasant idea which had just come to him. It had just struck eleven, and he was telling himself that they could hardly get to Paris before daybreak. Thought of the long night journey ahead of them had begun to appal him. Perhaps it would be wiser to put up in Mantes for the night. When this occurred to him, he was attracted at once by the idea, particularly because he had a profound desire now to possess Madeleine deep in some totally fresh retreat. During the preceding night, when they were both suffering from tortures in their cottage so close to *Noiraude*, he had longed for a totally unknown room in which they might lie together free from all traces of the past. This dream had come to him again on the empty highroad, and now how easy to realize it! He had only to knock on the door of the first inn they came to, and he would find that commonplace bedroom, that chance apartment in which he might try to find oblivion. Thus the idea of spending the night at Mantes which had first sprung from notions of prudence became a precious desire.

"What do you say to the idea of putting up here?" he suddenly asked her. "You must be worn out. We could go on in the morning.'

At her back Madeleine thought she could still hear that woman running, and she eagerly accepted Guillaume's suggestion.

"Yes," she cried, "oh yes, do let us spend the night here. I am dropping with sleep."

Guillaume peered out to see where they were. On the outskirts of the town he knew a big hotel at which they were sure to get a room. This was the *White Hart*, famous among carters and commercial travellers before the railway was built. It was a village all of itself, with its stables, its outhouses, its courtyards and its three blocks of buildings of varying height. A maze of endless corridors inside, with stairs haphazard all over the place between the floors, in former times it had teemed with travellers. Today, it was almost always empty. The proprietor had made a great effort to turn it into a more up-to-date hotel, but had only succeeded in making the furniture of bedrooms and lounges alike rather ridiculous, and he had recently

been seeing all his former clients leave him for one of his rivals who had had a new-style place run up, more like a private house, all furnished with mirrors and nickel, Paris-fashion.

Guillaume instinctively liked unpretentious, lonely places, so the *White Hart* was his choice. The next day was market-day, and the hotel staff were still up. A porter came out to open the courtyard gates into the main yard itself. Guillaume dismounted, to lead his horse inside himself, while the man went to find a candlestick and a key for them, as they had said they wished to retire at once.

Madeleine did not get out of the brougham till they were in the courtyard. She was not there more than two minutes altogether. Shaken by the bumpy drive, still uneasy because of that strange woman who had followed them, she stared about her uneasily. She had a curious feeling that she recognized this strange inn to which Guillaume had brought her. Facing her now was a red-brick dove-cote, and she was sure she had seen that somewhere. There was also a stable door painted yellow which was familiar. But she was so tired, and still so frightened, that her mind refused to remember clearly. It was beyond her to recover the memory she needed. Besides, in the darkness these black walls and the looming blocks of building, though lit by the moonlight, were as a whole wrapped in gloom, and she easily assured herself that of course she had never seen them before, it was only that stable door and the dove-cote which surprised her, even frightened her, in this place where she could not remember ever having been. It was only a passing sensation, a momentary stab of anxiety which served to augment her general disquiet and obscure fears.

The porter then came running back to them and led them through a labyrinth of narrow staircases, the boards of which tipped at alarming angles. He apologized for leading them in from the kitchen side, when they might have gone up by the main stairs. Madeleine stared all round her, but in the medley of corridors and stairs there was nothing further that was at all familiar.

At last the man unlocked a door. Then he found it necessary to start apologizing again.

"This room opens on to the yard," he said, "but it was ready, and you seemed in a hurry, sir. . . . But it's a lovely bed."

"That's all right," Guillaume replied. "Would you light a fire for us, please; it's very cold."

There was a pile of wood in a corner. The man took some logs and laid them on the dogs in the hearth. Meanwhile, Madeleine and

Guillaume walked up and down rather impatiently, anxious to be alone. She removed her hooded cloak and the silk wrap from her throat. The porter had finished lighting the fire and, after a last vigorous puff at the flames, suddenly stood stock still for a moment, staring at Madeleine. She happened at that moment to be looking down at her feet, which she was holding out, first one, then another, to warm her toes at the flames, and she did not notice what happened. The man gave a sly grin and shot Guillaume a roguish glance.

"Give my horse a good rub down, will you," said Guillaume, dismissing him. "I shall probably come down myself before going to bed, to make sure that everything is all right."

The apartment in which they were to spend the night was an enormous oblong room, the wall-paper on the walls of which had long lost its colours, turning to a grey so dirty that it was impossible to trace the garlands of old-style flowers with which no doubt it had originally been full. Across the ceiling, too, ran a huge crack, which was damp, and bordered with rusty patches, so that the cold, unadorned plaster was split from side to side by a yellowish band of dirty yellow. The walls were divided into panels and the woodwork of the room was painted blood red. The furniture consisted of one bellied chest of drawers with brass handles, a huge chiffonier, a round table and some chairs. Windows and bed were hung with blue gingham curtains with a border of white flowers. The chest of drawers was topped with marble, and on this stood one of those clocks set in a spun-glass case, the sort of childish wonder which peasants hand down from father to son. This one represented a country house which was all windows and ornate with arcades and balconies, while through the windows one could see inside drawing-rooms and bedrooms, where tiny dolls were reclining on divans.

However, the pinnacle of the hotel's luxury was reserved for the mantelpiece. Here there were two bouquets of artificial flowers, each carefully placed under a glass dome, and a dozen tea-cups which did not match, but were meticulously set out along the front edge of the alabaster shelf. In the middle, between the flower pieces, rose a remarkable structure of little shelves, a sort of monument made out of one of those boxes people win at fairs, with shepherds and sheperdesses on the lid. On this was mustered a good dozen figures of varying size, all very cleverly poised, the little ones on the big ones, to form a biazarre sort of piece of funerary sculpture. The graphic art too was represented in this room—by a series of pictures depicting the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. These pictures were framed in thin

black narrow framing and glazed with glass which was all greenish lumps. There were eight of them altogether around the walls, to which they added their rectangles of yellow, blue and red. These colours, laid on in flat, crude washes, most strangely accentuated the dinginess of the wall-paper. The childish *naïveté* of the drawing was absolutely rustic, and under each picture was a long caption, so long that it would have taken a good hour to read the whole set.

This room, which the innkeeper had thought he had made most comfortable by putting a mat under the round table, exuded that indefinable odour which is common to all such places. That is, it was redolent of airlessness and mould, plus a vague suspicion of old linen, threadbare upholstery and damp dust. Big, ramshackle and chilly, it was like a public hall through which the whole world had passed without anybody leaving behind anything of his heart or his habits. It had the vacant commonplaceness and the stupid bareness of a dormitory in any barracks. Here, in this narrow bed, half-way between double and single in size, men and women, old and young, had spent their passing nights, and all left it as cold as a bench in a public vestibule. No doubt both sorrow and delight had sojourned here, but the room had absorbed no trace of either any tears or laughter which had passed through it. Its vulgarity, its dinginess and its silence were full of a sort of shamefaced gloom, the same sickened melancholy that one finds in the wretched little rooms of prostitutes who have known the kisses of a whole district of a town. If one had probed about one would have found the stick of cosmetic which a dandified commercial traveller had forgotten, or behind one of those cups some hair-pins which had held the bun of a lady of the Latin quarter who somehow once found her way down to Mantes.

It was a more cosy sort of seclusion which Guillaume had had in mind, a retreat with a little more dignity, and for a moment he was pained at the sight of this shabby room. But he had no choice. Besides, after all it had what he had most wanted—it was an unfamiliar room, a nook in which nobody could disturb their peace. So, little by little, he recovered his spirits, even ended up by finding it rather funny to have left *Noiraude* to spend a night in such a hole as this. Seating himself at the fire, he put his arm round Madeleine, who, lost in thought, oblivious of her surroundings, was still holding out her toes to warm them, and drew her on to his knees.

"My poor darling," he murmured endearingly, "You are so tired, aren't you?"

"No," she replied, "but I got very cold after getting unwrapped. I must warm my feet before I get into bed."

She shivered. Despite herself, she was still thinking of the wretched woman who had followed them.

"You're not too angry with me for bringing you to this place?" Guillaume tried again to make contact with her. "I expect we shall have rather a poor night, but we'll go on early tomorrow morning. Though I rather like this room. Don't you think this dead quiet, this peace all round us, is wonderful?"

To this she made no response. She whispered: "It's that woman, coming into Mantes, she frightened me. . . . She looked at me with such evil eyes."

"Good Lord!" cried Guillaume, "what a child you are! First, you're afraid of Geneviève, now it's an old beggar-woman. You aren't usually such a scary one, you know. . . . Silly, she's sound asleep, snug enough, in a ditch somewhere."

"No, Guillaume," said Madeleine. "You didn't know, but she came on after us. I even thought I saw her come into this inn when we did."

"Very well then, perhaps she did. No doubt she wanted a bed-down in one of the stables. . . . Come, my dear, set your mind at rest, remind yourself that you and I are alone here, in each other's arms, cut off from everybody."

He had now clasped both arms about her waist, and pressed her closely to him, but she remained lifeless, limp, in his embrace, watching the logs burn, a worried look on her face, unresponsive to his worshipping eyes. The flames lit them both with ruddy light. The candle, up at one end of the chimney, made only a tiny hole of flickering light in the huge, damp bedroom.

"How peaceful everything is here," Guillaume went on, softly. "Not a sound to be heard, one really does feel one is deep in happy isolation at last. . . . Don't you think so? Just like one of those ancient monasteries in which men buried themselves for life, with only the unchanging sound of their bell to break the stillness. This lifeless place ought to calm our heart's fever. Don't you really feel calmer, dearest one, after breathing the icy air of this room?"

Her mind had flitted to that red-brick dovecote and the yellow stable door.

"I was thinking," she said, "somewhere before I've seen a yard just like the one we came in by . . . I can't think where. . . . Must have been long ago."

She paused, troubled, as if afraid to stir up memories. A faint smile tinged Guillaume's cheeks.

"You are asleep, my dearest, you are dreaming," he murmured. "Silly girl, it's all completely new to us. All day yesterday I dreamt of finding a refuge somewhere like this, out of the world we know. It is rather a dismal room, I admit, but for us it has the great charm of speaking to us solely of the immediate present. This vacancy, this commonplaceness of it all is so soothing! I must say it was a good idea of mine, breaking our journey here. We shall be back in our old happiness tomorrow, my sweet. . . . Hope, darling!"

She shook her head. Without looking away from the flames for an instant, she muttered: "I don't know what's come over me. . . . It chokes me . . . I feel quite funny here. . . . You see, something frightened me, and I still have a feeling that there is something threatening me."

Guillaume held her still more tenderly to him and the look he vouchsafed his wife's frightened features became exquisite in its gentleness.

"Whatever do you fear?" he insisted. "Are you not in my arms? Nobody can disturb us here. Oh, what joy it is to be able to say that not a person in this world knows we are here. Nobody knowing us, being deep in a hidden retreat, telling ourselves that not a soul, friend or foe, can knock on our door, is that not the supreme peace we need? I have always had the dream of living in a desert. Many a time have I searched the countryside for a lost hole in which to bury myself. Whenever I was out of sight of peasants and farm-houses, alone with the sky, sure no passer-by could see me, I felt so sad I could have died of it, but it was a lovely sadness and it would keep me away from people for hours. And here I am with you, Madeleine dear, just as years ago I used to be alone in the fields. . . . Smile again, dearest one, smile."

Again she shook her head, and swept her hand across her fore-head, as if to brush away the dull sense of alarm which kept her so cold, so lifeless. Guillaume went on:

"I have always detested and been scared by other people. The world can only wound us. When we left *Noiraude*, it was in my mind to stifle our suffering in the hurly-burly of Paris. But how much better for us the tranquillity of this isolation is! In this room there are only two people, and those two love each other. See, I have you in my arms, I can forget everything, forgive everything. There is not a soul whose scornful eyes can prevent me holding you close to me,

nobody to mock at the way I give you all myself. I want us to worship each other even more deeply, more supremely than before, far above the common, commonplace loves of ordinary folk, in an absolute tenderness totally indifferent to the miseries and shames of the earthly life. What does the past matter to us, why should we disturb ourselves over the wounds the outer world brings us? All we need is our mutual love, to cling to each other's necks, lost in ourselves, without ever an eye for what goes on about us. So long as there remains the corner for us to hide in we can seek it out and there find happiness. We should tell ourselves that we no longer know another soul, we are alone in this world, we have neither relations nor child nor friends. Let us bury ourselves in contemplation of our own love alone. We are alone now in the world, Madeleine, and I give myself to you. I am happy to be frail, and tell you that I love you still. . . . You have wrecked my life, Madeleine, and still I love you. . . ."

As he spoke, he grew quite excited. His deep, ardent voice took on the fervour of a man at prayer, now all at once dragging and humble, now again full of gentle, penetrating vibration. It was for him one of those moments in which by natural reaction the heart which has been locked up spills all it has. Had Madeleine but once glanced at him then and returned his worshipping look, he might well have fallen so low as to drop on his knees before her. After yesterday's anguish he was finding unique delight in thus yielding himself into this woman's arms, remote from all other eyes. This dream he was now expressing, the dream of being absorbed for ever within her, this fantasy of a life which would be nought but love and sleep, was the eternal cry of his hypersensitive nerves, which every instant the rough jolts of ordinary life could wound.

Slowly, comfort from this tender under-current of words whispered in her ear penetrated Madeleine and his heartfelt embraces warmed her. Light returned to her grey eyes, her lips parted and the colour returned to them, but still she did not smile, merely felt a tremendous relief at finding herself loved so completely. She turned away from the fire at last and looked at her husband. When Guillaume met her glance, he was greatly moved, and went on to say:

"If you like, dearest, we can go on and on, travelling like this, sleeping where chance brings us every night and the next day plunging on farther into the unknown. We could leave France and by slow stages reach the lands of sunshine and the open air. And in such continual change of horizon we could feel oursleves still more

alone, still closer. Nobody would know us, not a soul would have the right to approach us. We should never spend more than one night in whatever inns we found on our road. Our mutual love would then never be attached to things. In time we should be utterly free from the whole world, with no other bond than that we had for each other. I dream of exile, Madeleine, that exile I might be vouchsafed on your bosom. I should want only you with me, to feel the wind on my cheek while I lay pillowed on your breast, wherever the winds cast me. Nothing else would exist for me but this white bosom within which I should hear the beating of your heart. And when at last we were lost in the heart of some other nation whose very language we did not know, we should hear but each other's talk and be able to look on those about us as if they were deaf-and-dumb animals. We should be truly isolated then, we should pass through crowds without thought of what such masses said, as indifferent regarding them as we used to be when we went on our walks and passed through a flock of sheep at its pasturage. And like that we could go on forever. . . . Shall we, dearest one?"

Gradually a smile softened the young woman's lips and her tense body relaxed. She lay limply now on Guillaume's breast. She had slipped one arm about his neck. With new peace in her countenance, she gazed at him.

"Aren't you a child," she whispered. "Darling, you are dreaming awake, the travels you suggest would bore us to tears in a week. . . . Why not go the whole hog at once, and have a Gypsy caravan built for us, eh?"

And she gave a little laugh which for all its lightness and affection, was rather taunting. Indeed, he would have been quite hurt, had she not immediately followed it by a kiss. Gently, he shook his head.

"True," he said, "I am a child. But children can love, dear heart. My feeling is that now our happiness needs solitude. You talk of Gypsies. Well, Gypsies are happy folk, who live in the sunshine, people I often used to envy when I was at school. When we used to go out for our walks, I nearly always saw tribes of them at the town gates, where they camped on that empty commonland where the wheelwrights had their shops. I used to run up and down the tree-trunks that lay about and watch them cooking their pots. The children would be rolling about on the ground, the men and women had unfamiliar faces and the insides of their caravans, when I peeped in, seemed to be full of the weirdest objects. There I would linger, hanging about round them, frightened and inquisitive at the same

time. My shoulders would still be sore from the heavy blows my school-fellows had dealt me the day before, and there were times when I dreamed of going far away in one of those homes on wheels. I used to say to myself: if they knock me about again this week I shall join the Gypsies next Sunday, and beg them to take me with them deep into some part where I shall not be knocked about. My boyhood fantasy delighted then in the idea of an everlasting journey in the open air. But I never had the courage. . . . Don't laugh at me, Madeleine darling."

Smiling continuously now, with her glance she egged him to continue. This childish talk soothed her, for a moment concealing from her the conflict which was agonizing them both.

"I must admit," Guillaume continued, cheerfully, "I was a very wild boy. The blows I received made me dour and unsociable. In the night, in the dormitory, when I could not sleep, I used to shut my eyes and see patches of country, curiously deserted spots, which suddenly built up in my head, and gradually I fashioned them to suit my own mixture of wildness and gentleness. Most often there were grottoes in the rocks, and deep down below roared mountain streams; overhead the hill-slopes rose steeply, grey mountain against a merciless blue sky, where slow eagles soared. Then on the edge of the precipice I would heave a white rock from among the others to the edge and there see myself seated like a dead person, in the heart of all that bare vastness. At other times, my dreams were more gentle. I created an island the size of my hand, thrown into the mid-course of a broad, slow-flowing river. Only with difficulty could one thence perceive the distant banks, like two green ribbons, lost in the mists, and the sky would then be pale grey and the poplars of my island would tower up into the white river vapour. I would then see myself prostrate on the soft grasses, lulled to sleep by the endless dull vast murmur of the river, refreshened too by the warm breathing of all the damp vegetation about me. Those landscapes which I imagined and loved endlessly to change, removing rocks, adding trees, used to appear to me with astonishing vividness. They consoled me, they bore me away into unknown territory where I felt I could live whole lifetimes of silence and peace. When I opened my eyes again, when it all disappeared and I found myself back in my dismal dormitory, lit by the dim glimmer of the night-light, my heart was cramped with anguish as I listened to my schoolfellows breathing and trembled as I though I heard them waking and coming to bully me again for having tried to escape them in my dreams."

He paused, to return to Madeleine the kisses she had just planted on his forehead. She was moved by the story he had told her of his childhood sufferings. In this moment of frankness she had suddenly got inside that over-sensitive, highly-strung nature of his and she swore to herself she would love him as he deserved and lavish on him love and affection of the purest and most unconditioned kind.

"Later," he went on, "when that idea of escaping with the Gypsies came to me, I gave way only in the hope that as I travelled I might find those landscapes I had seen in my dreams. I was convinced that I would find them somewhere or other and persuaded myself that I had conceived them exactly as they really were. It must have been a kind angel that revealed them to me, for I rejected the notion that I had concocted it all out of my head, and would certainly have been most upset had it been proved to me that they existed only deep in my own brain. They called to me, they told me I should come and find repose in them, they promised me a life of everlasting peace."

He paused again, hesitant, afraid to go on. Then, with a shy smile and the embarrassed look a man assumes when admitting to something that is childish, he whispered: "And shall I tell you the truth, dearest? I still believe that those landscapes in which I spent so many nights as a boy do exist. During the day I was bullied. I looked up at the cold school walls with the despair of a prisoner locked in a torture-chamber. But at night I raced through the countryside, intoxicated with the fresh air, finding profound delight now that no fist was poised over my head. I led two lives, each disturbingly real. Of course my dreams cannot have cheated me. Supposing we searched, supposing, somewhere on this earth, we did find my rocky ravine or my isle cast out into the middle of a vast river? There, dearest one, that is why I want to travel without any particular aim. I am sure that one day I will find the seclusion I seek. If only you knew how marvellous those places were in my dreams. There our sleep would be really sound, we should live for ever remote from the world, remote from all that has hurt us. It would be life turned into dream. . . . Shall we then set out in search of one of those happy scenes? That is where you and I ought to find our love. And you mustn't laugh, dearest one, they do exist, I have seen them."

Madeleine was laughing no longer. Tears had come to her eyes and her lips were quivering with emotion. The things Guillaume was saying and the sing-song way he told her all this had made her

cry. How he did love her, what profundity of inexpressible affection she did find in him! Though she did not know it, it was her regret at being unable to give the whole of herself to him, without a trace of any misgiving, that made her so sentimental, though consciously all she was aware of was the soft touch of every word as it dropped from his lips. From time to time she planted a kiss on his cheek, while he went on talking, and let herself fall deep into his bosom, yielding under his arms, herself holding him fast by the neck. The red coals of the burning logs, blazing high now, shed a warm glow over them, and at their backs the vast, strange room slumbered on.

"Child, child!" she said again. "But no matter, even if we never realize your dream, we can always love each other dearly."

"But why not run away?" he insisted.

Again there was a faint smile on her lips.

"Because we cannot go and live in castles in Spain, my dear poet," she said. "Our happiness must be within us. It is no use putting it off to the good fortune of finding it lying in wait for us somewhere. I see you have forgotten everything, and I feel I too have forgotten. You and I still have a long time to love each other in."

Then, seeing him turn sad again, she added cheerfully: "As we are now, we should be happy anywhere. I defy misfortune. I don't know what can have made me so timorous coming here. I was half asleep, and I was chilled through. And then there was something strangely repellent about this place. . . . But now we are here, warming ourselves and talking like this, I see you are right: it is lovely here with this tremendous silence all round us. The fact is, what you have just said has chased away all my anxiety . . . I can hope."

Hearing her talk like this, Guillaume was consoled at once.

"Yes, do hope, my dearest," he said. "See how united you and I are. Nothing will ever separate us again."

"Nothing," she agreed, "if we always love each other as we do now. We can go back to *Noiraude* or go on to Paris, with our love we should be all right anywhere. . . . Love me ceaselessly as you loved me just now, and I shall be well, I promise you. . . . I am yours, understand, yours, only."

They clasped each other fiercely and for some minutes exchanged silent kisses. Then the clock struck midnight.

"It's twelve already!" cried Madeleine. "We really ought to get into bed, if we're going to be up early."

She slipped from his knees, while he stood up, saying: "I'll just

run out to the stable a moment, I must see how that man has bedded the mare down. . . . You won't be afraid here alone for a moment?"

"Afraid of what?" She laughed. "You know I am not a frightened sort. . . . I expect you'll find me in bed when you get back. Hurry!"

They exchanged a last kiss. Then, leaving the key in the door, Guillaume ran down.

When Madeleine was alone, she stood for a while lost in thought, gazing into the fire with the lurking smile that Guillaume's tender talk had brought to her countenance. As she had just told him, she felt great relief, felt cradled by fresh hope. So far she had not even glanced at the room. Entering, she had gone straight to the hearth, to warm her feet, and had stayed there afterwards, on Guillaume's knees. Now, awaking from her reverie, she thought that before going to bed she would put in order the few pieces of luggage which the man had brought up and dumped in a heap in the corner.

She looked about her, and in that very instant, in a flash, all her former disquiet returned, without her being able at first to understand the vague fear which held her. She was shaken again by that same feeling of repulsion and anxiety which she had begun to feel in the courtyard of the inn. Though the candle lighted the walls so dimly that she could distinguish nothing clearly, she seemed to know this room. She told herself she was being very silly to be so timid, she must be dreaming too. Thus arguing with herself to keep herself calm, she put her things in order. Where was their holdall? When she looked about the room, she found it where the man had put it on the top of the chest-of-drawers, where it completely hid the spun-glass clock. When she took it down and disclosed the clock, however, she stood transfixed, and the colour left her cheeks.

She had not been mistaken. She did know this inn! She even knew this room! She had once slept here with Jacques! For, when a student, the surgeon had been mad about rowing, and often went down to Rouen, with other friends, who all took their mistresses. Madeleine had been on one of those trips. When she had reached Mantes, she had felt unwell, so they had all put up—and at the *White Hart*!

Petrified, aghast, she stared at that clock. There could be no doubt about such a thing. Such country-houses of glass work are rare. Besides, she recognized the arcades and those wide-open windows through which one could see the inside of the rooms. She recalled how Jacques and she had laughed and laughed at the little dolls inside. They had even taken off the glass dome which enclosed it

and switched some of the dolls about between the rooms. And it suddenly seemed as if all this had been but yesterday, and there were only a few hours between that event and now. The candle, placed beside the fragile glasswork, shot its rays between the slender glass columns into the tiny rooms with their transparent walls, placing a spot of light inside every drop of glass which had run, transforming the stairs between the terraces into needles of fire. It was a magic palace, a palace with thousands of invisible little points of light which lit it all with gleams of yellow and green. And she stared at that scintillation of starlight with terror, as if the fragile toy concealed a terrible, menacing weapon.

Shrinking back, she took the candle and went round the room. At every step, she came upon a memory. One by one she recognized the tinted pictures with the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. There were even stains on the wall-paper which caught her eye. Every stick was eloquent with the past. When she came to the bed, she even had the impression that the very same sheets were on it which were there that night, and she was about to sleep with Guillaume in a bed still warm from Jacques' body.

It was this thought that broke her. She had been prowling about this room like a sleep-walker, eyes staring, lips pursed, examining every detail with mad particularity, as if it was of tremendous importance not to let a single detail slip. But when her fingers touched those blue gingham curtains with their white flowered borders on the rod above the bed, she suddenly felt her legs give way beneath her, and she had to sit down. Her mind was now obsessed by that narrow bed, which towered in the centre of the room like a white tombstone. She told herself that she would never consent to sleep in it with Guillaume.

She clutched her forehead with both hands. She felt her head would burst. Sombre fury welled up within her. The savagery with which those memories insisted on pursuing her and striking at her now enraged her. Could she not be allowed to sleep even one single night in peace, was she never to be allowed to forget? Jacques was getting at her even in this lost place, even in this chance inn where pure fortune had brought her. And she had been so foolish as to hope and claim that she was soothed and healed. She would have done better to give heed to her dismay, to that sense of disquiet which had warned her of the blow which was to come. This time it would drive her mad. Whatever was she to say to her husband, what could she tell this man whose affectionate words had lulled her into

a lying dream only a few minutes ago? Was she going to have the courage to say: "Look here, you were wrong, this room has a curse on it, I have already slept in it, with my first lover!" Or was she going to hold her tongue, and consent to lie like a whore in Guillaume's arms while her mind was on Jacques? In her anxiety, she stared at the door, listening to the vague sounds of the house, fearing to hear Guillaume's returning footsteps, shivering all over at the thought of seeing him re-appear and still not knowing what to say.

Just as she was listening, she thought she heard soft footsteps in the corridor. Then they seemed to stop at the door. There was a discreet knock.

"Come in," she said, frightened, but speaking mechanically, not aware of what she was saying.

The door opened and Jacques himself appeared.

CHAPTER TEN

When Jacques got up, the next morning, at *Noiraude*, he was very taken aback by the sudden departure of both Guillaume and his wife. Of course, he had not the slightest suspicion of the terrible scene caused by his presence. Briefly, Geneviève told him a story about the sudden death of a relative obliging her master and mistress to leave during the night. He had no reason whatsoever to question the truth of it.

"So much for that!" he said. "Then I shall see my turtle-doves when I get back from Toulon." And he had no other thought than to spend the time before his train that evening as cheerfully as possible. To while it away, he took a look round sleepy little Véteuil, but was unlucky enough not to come upon a single one of his old school-fellows, and time seemed very long, till in the early evening, when it wanted only a few minutes more before he took the coach to Mantes, he was suddenly accosted by a hearty individual who gave a loud cry of recognition, after which, at length, this man gave Jacques all the details of his uncle's last moments, so that, when at last he did get away, it was to find that the coach had gone. After that, it took him an hour to find somebody to drive him to Mantes, so that he got there just in time to hear the train's departing whistle. Ascertaining that there was an early morning train which reached Paris in time for his connection south, he decided to put up at the *White Hart*, where he had spent more than one jolly week-end.

Here, he was quite at home. The staff were all the same, and with that liberty common to hotel servants the porter who showed him his room reminded him of the occasion when he put up there with "Madame Madeleine". Now, that was a skirt, he said, he never had forgotten, she'd been a very decent bit of goods, she had, an open-handed girl if ever there was one.

It must have been about ten o'clock. Jacques sat by the fireside, smoking, till well after eleven, and was just going to bed, when there came a discreet little tap at his door. He unlocked it. There was the porter, with a sly look on his face, stammering that he had something to tell Monsieur Jacques, but did not know if he should. Monsieur Jacques must promise first to forgive him if he was being indiscreet,

but if it was meddling, he only wanted to please Monsieur Jacques, seeing he had only just got back to the old country from abroad, and no doubt would be glad to have news of a certain feminine party. That of course thoroughly whetted Jacques' curiosity.

Now, with as much indelicacy as he had so far shown delicacy, the porter explained that "Madame Madeleine", of whom he had just been speaking, was putting up there too, she wasn't alone, of course, she had a certain person with her. With a roguish little snigger the man added that he had given the couple No. 7. "A room, sir, I expect you yourself have pleasant memories of."

Jacques could not help sniggering back. His fine feelings had long since been sufficiently blunted by all his ephemeral loves for such talk not to hurt any sensibility. He even questioned the man further: was Madame Madeleine as pretty as she had been, yes, and —was the man she had with her young, or getting on in years? After which, with an assurance to the porter that the presence of the lady in question so close at hand was not going to disturb his sleep, he dismissed the man.

He had been too sanguine. The moment the porter was gone, he began pacing up and down the bedroom, in spite of himself beset by thoughts of that past love-affair. He was not a man given to such reflections and all these years of absence he had scarcely been troubled by a single thought about his one-time mistress. And yet it was not without disturbing feelings that he now learned that she was actually here, in a neighbouring room, with another. Madeleine was the only woman with whom he had lived a husband and wife existence for a whole year. Besides, the very fact that she had been a virgin when she came into his life marked her out in his eyes from all the many women he had loved for a night and invariably ejected the following morning. For that matter, he told himself with philosophic detachment that this was what life was like, of course seeing Madeleine in somebody else's arms when he got back was all that he had expected. It was far from his mind to reproach himself with having started this young woman on a life which had its hazards. He told himself that she would certainly make her way. No doubt, she had found a rich lover. But his musing ended in a keen feeling that he would like to give her an old-time handshake. He no longer loved her. No, but it would be very nice to exchange a word with her. And with this idea of just saying *how-d'ye-do* to Madeleine, the faint heart twinges he had felt vanished and his only thought was, how to find an opportunity for a couple of minutes with her. To do so

seemed the most natural thing in the world, and just suited his jovial nature, though he certainly did rather expect his ex-mistress to greet him open armed. Had the idea even occurred to him that she might be married, he would have rejected it as really too silly. He was only able to think of her as she had been when she lived with him in that hotel in Soufflot Street. He pictured her with all his clay-pipe smoking friends around her. It therefore seemed to him that all he needed to do was to be prudent, for he did not want to depreciate her in any way in her new lover's eyes.

His room was at the end of the corridor. There were three others between it and No. 7. Opening his door an inch, he listened. How difficult this was going to be. He was beginning to wonder however he was going to find an opportunity before he left, early the next morning, when he caught the sound of another door opening. Sticking out his head, in the darkness he caught a vague glimpse of a man leaving No. 7 and going dowstairs. When the sound of this person's footsteps vanished, Jacques chuckled silently. "Ahah! Now the good man is away," he said to himself, "now's the moment to offer the dear girl my compliments."

Tiptoeing down the corridor, he played a light tattoo on Madeleine's door, and opened it. When he was inside and she beheld him, he saw her leap to her feet. Yet this sudden appearance was not such a violent shock to Madeleine as it might have been under other circumstances. She was indeed almost expecting it. From the instant that she had recognized that room and all her past memories beset her, her mind had been full of her former lover. Now here he was, entering the room. It seemed but natural. This was his room. She did not even wonder how Jacques could be at the *White Hart*, or how he had learned of her presence there. She merely felt ice run through her veins. Erect, motionless, staring at him with strange calm, she waited for him to speak first.

"Well, well, so it really is Madeleine," he said at last in a low voice, and gave her a complacent smile. "Joe's certainly got a fine memory. . . . Remember him? The one who waited on us when we put up here? It's he just told me you were here. He recognized you. . . . My dear child, I only wanted to say how do you do."

He held out his hands and approached her, all cordiality and smiles. She recoiled.

"No, no," she whispered.

The refusal seemed to take him by surprise, but he was not put out by that.

"Don't want to shake hands?" he said. "Now why not? You surely don't think I want to upset your new love. I'm a friend, Madeleine, an old pal, that's all. . . . I waited till the gentleman in question was out. I'll be gone again before he gets back. . . . Is it that lout, Raoul?"

That lout Raoul was the student who a few minutes after Jacques had left her, suggested to Madeleine that she might live with him. The name made her shudder. This suggestion which Jacques now made, that there could ever have been a liaison between herself and one of his old friends, hurt her to the quick. "Should I tell him everything?" she asked herself. Cornered, wounded, she began to recover her real vigour and determination. In a few short words, she was about to confess the truth to her former lover and beg him never to try to see her again, when in his ebullient way he continued:

"No answer? Heavens, aren't we careful! Did you pick this room? You do remember it, don't you? Ah, my pet, what jolly times we did have together in those days. . . . But it wasn't very nice of you to the other chap to bring him here, was it now?"

He laughed blatantly. The suggestion was appalling to Madeleine. In utter stupefaction, she stared at him.

"Oh, I'm not conceited," he went on. "I just thought perhaps you had forgotten all about me. . . . Only I'd hardly like to be in that fellow's shoes, you know. . . . Now out with it—'twixt you and me, what made you pick this room? No answer? . . . Got your knife in me?"

"No," she said, in a dull voice.

Staggering suddenly, she leant against the wall by the fire, not to fall. She felt the pluck to tell him vanish. Now that Jacques had laughed like this at the expense of the man who was to spend the night with her in this room in which she and Jacques had once made love, she would never dare mention Guillaume's name. And the fact that by this coarse loose-liver's quip he suggested she had deliberately chosen this room was the last straw. She had the feeling that her first lover had thereby cast her down into mire from which she could never rise. She felt herself befouled with so permanent a stain that she lowered her eyes in shame, as if really guilty. In any case, Jacques' presence alone brought back that sense of dismay which the day before had robbed her of her ordinary levelheadedness and vigour. His hearty temperament stirred her deeply. By the mere sound of his voice, this dominant character, to whom by intimate bonds of the flesh she still belonged, undermined her will. With one

glance he reduced her to weakness. She was conquered and panting. Feeling her spine weaken with a mastered woman's weakness, she took fright at her own initial thought of struggling against him, and yielded. She realized that Jacques knew nothing at all of her life. Mere chance had brought him here, to this inn. She would drink her cup of shame to the last dregs, keeping silence, and waiting for him to go. He could have no notion of the thoughts which had drained every drop of blood from her cheeks and made her tremble so. He must have concluded that she had thought him capable of waiting for her companion to return, to make a ludicrous scene.

"Come, don't shake so," he cried, still laughing. "Think I am such a beast? I've already told you, I only wanted to say *how-de-do*. Here one moment and gone the next. Don't be silly, I don't want to find out who it is. I'm not a bit interested. At the slightest sound, I'm off. . . ."

He went to the door, which he had left ajar, and listened. Then he came back, for Madeleine's frigidity was not going to rob him of his bonhomie. In fact, the unusual nature of this meeting rather amused him. He was totally unaware of any cruel or coarse aspect of it.

"Did you know," he went on, "I nearly left my bones out there, good and proper, at the bottom of the sea. But the fishes didn't want me. . . . Now I've come back to live in Paris. Oh, we'll meet there some day, and I'm sure you won't look at me in such horror. . . . But tell me, what's happened to you? What are you doing?"

"Nothing," Madeleine replied.

She was utterly spineless, listening and replying mechanically. She told herself he would go at last. Then, she would think what to do. She was so lost that it never even occurred to her that her husband might return at any moment.

"Oh!" he said, rather put out by this, "doing nothing. . . . Heavens, but you are a cold fish! And me thinking you'd welcome me! . . . So you're fond of the chap, eh?

"I am."

"And right you are, too! I hate people with empty hearts. . . . Been with him long?"

"Five years."

"Well, I'm damned! Now that's a serious love, that it! Really not that lout Raoul? Then it's George? No? Then perhaps it's that little fair-headed chap, Julien Durand? Wrong again? . . . What, somebody I don't know at all?"

She turned still whiter. A shudder so fiercc shook her that her features twisted with unbelievable pain. Jacques' impression again was that she thought she could hear her lovcr coming.

"Now then, don't you get the shivers like that, lass," he cried, "didn't I promise to slip away the moment he appears on the scene? But it's nice having thc chance of a word with you. . . . So you don't see any more of the boys I've just mentioned?"

"No."

"They were good pals, you know, nothing deep, but more than once I thought of them when I was far away from the old country. . . . Remember what jolly times we all used to have together? Out early in the morning, to the woods at Verrière, back at evening, with armfuls of lilac. I can just see those great salad-bowls of raspberries now! Didn't we gorge, eh? And that little room we spent so many a night in. I'd be up by five to open those shutters wide, so you would be wakened by the sun. . . . But I have always told myself that another one of the boys must have taken my place in your heart."

Madeleine made a gesture of supplication. But by now Jacques was getting nettled by her cold demeanour. Coarsely, he ran on:

"Come along now, out with it, I shan't mind. . . . It had to be, don't deny it. . . . Why, that's what life is, meeting, parting, re-meeting. I come upon one or another of my old flames every week, I tell you. . . . You do wrong to take it tragically and treat me like an enemy, you who were so cheerful and carefree!"

He looked her up and down. He was not a little surprised to find her so plump and so well, her beauty come to such full flower.

"No use sulking at me," he chided her. "I think you're even better-looking than you used to be. You've become matronly, Mady. Wcll, you deserved to be happy. . . . Come, give me a nice smile, lass. Oh, that glorious auburn head, that soft pearly skin!"

He had suddenly drawn close to her. A glint of desire came into his eyes.

"Come, won't you give me a kiss before I go?"

She leant back, to elude those hands reaching out for her.

"No, leave me alone, please leave me alone," she stammered, in a suffocated voice.

Struck by the desperate note in her voice, Jacques turned grave at once. The kindly feelings deep within him were stirred. He had an uncertain fecling that he had unintentionally been rough, perhaps even crucl. Without another word, he made for the door. Then, pausing, he turned back.

"You're right, Madeleine," he said. "I'm an idiot. It was a mistake coming to see you. . . . You forgive me my laughter, and I'll forgive your coldness. Though I must say, I'm afraid you lack both memory and heart. But if you really love this fellow, don't spend the night with him in this room."

He spoke gravely, and when he pointed sharply to the walls of the room, she had to make a great effort, not to cry.

"I'm a play-boy," he said. "I scatter a little love all over the place. I'm not choosy, either. But all the same, I can hear this bed, all this furniture, this whole room speak to me—about you. . . . Think back, Madeleine!"

The thoughts he evoked brought another glint of desire to his flashing eyes.

"Come on," he said, going over to her again, "one good hand-shake, and I'm gone."

"No, no," she repeated, in great distress.

He held her shivering under his glance for some instants more then, with a shrug of the shoulders, left the room. What a ninny she was, he decided, at last. His brief regret at having intruded on her and been a little rough was now smothered by dull irritation with this former mistress who would not even shake his hand. There had indeed been a flash of sensitivity in him when he pointed to the familiarity of that room. But that feeling of sentiment had come from a vague jealousy which he would have blushed to admit openly.

Once she was alone, Madeleine began mechanically pacing round and round the room, beside herself, senselessly moving one parcel after another. Within her a strange, deafening clamour drowned her own thoughts. For a moment she thought she might run after Jacques and tell him she had married Guillaume. But now she no longer had him before her, the strength to make such a confession quickly vanished. Not that she had been prompted to such an act of courage by any thought that she would be loyal to her husband and ensure him peace. No, her only thought was of herself, for at the end she had rebelled against that mocking, familiar scorn which Jacques had shown her, and wanted to let him be in no doubts that she was now a respectable married woman, whom he should esteem. This revolt of her pride clouded the real position for her and she no longer gave a thought to what she was going to say to Guillaume when he came back. She was so exacerbated by this persistence with which events would strike at her that all she now felt was rage and

an egoistic need to relieve her mind without delay in some forceful way.

While she was pacing agitatedly up and down like this, the door of the room, which Jacques had not closed properly, suddenly creaked. She swung round, thinking it was Guillaume back. But what should she now see in the doorway but that beggar-woman she had seen on the turnpike, the ragged woman who had followed the brougham all the way to the *White Hart.*

Going up to her, this woman now peered closely at her.

"I was not mistaken," she declared. "Though your face was in the shadow it was you, Madeleine. Do you not recognize me?"

Madeleine stared, in utter bewilderment, now the light fell full on this woman's face, but her heart hardened, and she refused to be upset.

"Yes, I recognize you, Louise," she replied, in tones through which reverberated all the rage and rebellion her being was capable of.

It had only lacked the appearance of this woman, to make her really furious. For Louise was none other than the friend of former days who had taken her as travelling companion when on the eve of Jacques' departure this girl—as she then was—had gone to see her little girl, farmed out some miles from Paris. In the *Quartier Latin* Louise had been known by the soubriquet of "Verdigris," from the way she used to soak herself in absinthe, till it actually did give her flabby, unhealthy cheeks a greenish hue, and she was pointed out as a celebrity for whose favour truant schoolboys vied. Crazed and hysterical from absinthe, in the public dancing halls, Louise used to attach herself to any man. She was utterly given up to sodden debauch, bestially so, utterly unconcerned by the foul odours of the gutter in which she wallowed, though there had indeed been a brief period, that in which she had had this child, when she seemed to sober up a little. Her fish-wife spirit rather pleased Jacques, and he made no scruple about selecting her as a companion for Madeleine, particularly since just then she happened to be the mistress of one of his own friends, for at this particular time Louise used to say that she wanted to settle down and stick to one man. After that she wallowed in filth again. She had been incapable of taking her motherhood seriously for long and began to mock at herself for having entertained such idiotic ideas for some months. Later, when she herself was already living with Guillaume, Madeleine had one night seen Louise sprawling dead drunk along the pavement, with a couple of students, who were banging her about, and trying to

hold her up, and this degraded creature had stuck in Madeleine's memory as the most revolting detail of her former life.

Now, it seemed, "Verdigris" had sunk to the uttermost depths of shame. She must have been in her early thirties, but one would easily have given her fifty. She had on a wretched, tattered gown, too short anyway, which, through its rents additionally revealed her legs. She had on her feet a worn-out old pair of men's boots. Round her body she had knotted an old plaid rug, from which, blue with cold, thrust her half-naked arms. Her face, framed in a kerchief knotted under her chin, wore an expression of brutish stupefaction. Alcohol had turned it to a disgusting mask, the lips pendulous and discoloured, the eyes uncertain and blood-stained. Her voice was hoarse and indistinct, her words broken by hiccoughs, eked out by vague gestures in which lurked something of the lewd charm of her former bacchanalian ways. But what above all made this debauch-eroded woman foul and lamentable was her air of being utterly lost, and the palsy which shook her without cease. Absinthe had corroded flesh and mind alike. She acted and spoke in a sort of stupor, constantly broken by nervous twitchings and sudden bursts of excitement. To Madeleine's mind came Guillaume's story of a woman roving about like a loony. But for all that she thought this woman completely deranged, Madeleine was none the less disgusted.

"Yes, I recognize you," she said, harshly. "What do you want of me?"

Louise still gaped, with a cloudy-eyed stare. Then, with a lunatic laugh, she cried: "You talk high style to me now, do you, it's *milady* now, is it? . . . Is that because I'm not dressed in silk like you? My dear girl, you know very well life has its ups and downs. Tomorrow you may be as wretched as I am today!"

Every word of this wounded Madeleine and made her more enraged. All her past reared up before her. She told herself that this woman was quite right, she too might have fallen to these depths of infamy.

"You are mistaken," she said, angrily. "I am married now. . . . Leave me alone!"

But the madwoman kept on crying: "You had real luck, you did. Not me. . . . When I saw you in that cab with a man, I told myself you'd got hold of a millionaire. . . . So it's your husband, is it, who threw that five-franc piece out to me?"

Madeleine did not reply. This was agonizing to her. "Verdigris"

meanwhile was struggling to think and cope with the finer feelings which had suddenly risen in her. At last she fumbled in a pocket.

"Wait you here," she muttered. "I'm going to give you back your five francs! . . . A husband's money is sacred! . . . I thought the gent was your lover. There would have been nothing wrong, would there, taking five francs from an old friend's lover?"

Madeleine waved her back.

"Keep the money," she said. "I give it you. . . . What else do you want?"

"Me? Nought," said Louise, stupidly, then remembered, and began sniggering again. "Oh, but yes, I do want something, I've just remembered. . . . It wasn't very nice of you, Madeleine. My head doesn't work too well. You upset me with your fine airs. I wanted a little chat, I wanted to talk about the good old timcs, and have a laugh with you. . . . I was so pleased when I saw you in that cab. I followed you because I didn't dare offer you my hand while the gentleman was there. Besides, as you can imagine, I wanted to be alone with you. Because I never see a soul of any of our old company here. I am glad you're happy."

She sat down, croaking and chattering away with an intimacy which touched Madeleine's sensitive feelings on the raw. Her gestures were flaccid. She huddled in her rags and gaped dimly up at her old friend. Her own eyes swam with drunken sentiment. That gutter accent which she strove to make sound wheedling, coupled with the cosseting attitude of her limp body, made her a wretched, unbearable spectacle.

"You see," she went on, "I've had no luck. . . . I fell ill in Paris. Too much absinthe, they say. My head seemed to be quite empty. I shivered all over like an aspen. Look at my hands, they are still a bit palsied. . . . In the hospital, oh, how afeared I was of the doctors! I heard them when they came their rounds say it was all u.p. with me, I hadn't much more in my belly, they said, so I said: *let me go*, and they let me go. I had the idea of going back to Forgues, that's a little village about a couple of miles from here, my father was wheelwright there. One of my old lovers bought me a ticket on the railway. . . ."

She paused for breath. She could only talk in short gasps now.

"Just think," she said, "my father was dead. He went broke. In his place I found another wheelwright. He showed me the door. It'll soon be six months since then. I would gladly have gone back to Paris, but I hadn't a penny left and my clothes were falling to

pieces. . . . I was finished, as they had said at the hospital. No man would have picked me up with a pair of tongs. So I stayed in the country. The peasants are not bad folk, they give me something to eat. . . . Sometimes boys do throw stones at me on the road. . . ."

Her voice was scarcely audible. With ice at heart, Madeleine listened. She no longer had the courage to turn the woman out. At last, "Verdigris" suddenly gave an impatient jerk of the head, getting back her oldtime scornful grin. It revealed teeth which were yellowing.

"Bah, my dear girl," she cried. "I've had my bit of fun! Remember how the boys used to run after me? And we had jolly parties, out at Verrière Woods, didn't we now? I used to think a lot of you, you never said silly things to me. Though I remember, once I made you furious with me, out in the country, when my lover kissed you and I pretended to be jealous. Damn all, I cared, let me tell you!"

Every drop of blood seemed to drain from Madeleine's cheeks. The memories this wretched creature awakened suffocated her.

"I say," Louise suddenly demanded. "That type you were silly over, that big chap. Pierre, was that his name? Or was it Jacques? I can't remember, what did you do with him? Now that was a jolly sort. There's something I must tell you. He used to run after me. I amused him, I did. It can't make you angry now to know it. . . . Ever see him, nowadays?"

At the end of her strength, Madeleine could bear no longer the anguish which the presence of "Verdigris" caused her. Her rage seethed up again, her whole being was outraged.

"I have told you that I am married now," she replied. "Go away, go away!"

The madwoman was frightened. She leapt to her feet as if she had heard the noise of those urchins who stoned her by the roadside.

"Why do you tell me to go away?" she stammered. "I never did you any harm. I was your friend. You and I never quarrelled?"

"Go away!" Madeleine kept on saying. "I am not the same as I was when you knew me. I have a little girl."

"But I had a little girl too. . . . I've lost mine. . . . I forgot to pay the foster mother for months and they took her away from me. . . . It's not nice of you, treating me like a dog. Not for nothing in the old days I used to call you a meanie, with your sweety-sweet airs."

And now that Madeleine was gently pushing her towards the door, Louise quite lost control and cried out, stridently: "If you've had good luck, that's no reason to despise other people! Your blood was no bluer than mine, do you hear, when you and I both lived in the quarter. If your gentleman had met me, I might have been wearing your silk things today and you running barefoot about the roads. . . . Just get that into your head, my girl."

At this moment, Madeleine heard Guillaume returning. Seized by fury, she snatched at Louise's wrist and dragged her violently back into the middle of the room.

"How right you are!" she cried. "Here is my husband coming. You stay and tell him how shabby I am!"

"Oh, no," cried the other woman, tearing herself free. "In the end it's me you've made angry. You are too proud, let me tell you. . . . I am going. I don't want to do you any harm."

But, just as she was going out, Guillaume entered. He halted, astonished to see the beggar-woman there, and looked questioningly across at Madeleine. Rigid with fury, Madeleine was leaning against the big chiffonier. Not a trace of flush on her forehead, not a hint of any disturbance in her glance. She was icy, determined, her features contracted with malicious vigour, and she seemed to be making ready for a fight.

"Guillaume, this is an old friend of mine," she said, straight away. "She came to have a chat with me. . . . Won't you ask her to come to see us at *Noiraude*?"

These words were a painful blow for Guillaume. By the tone of Madeleine's voice, he sensed that once again their peace of mind was destroyed. Mute anguish clouded his face. He went up to Louise. In a low voice, charged with emotion, he addressed her:

"Did you know Madeleine?"

"Yes, sir," the wretched creature replied. "But don't you pay any attention to what she says. Had I known about her being married, I should never have come up."

"Do you need money?"

Louise made a superb gesture of refusal.

"No, thank you. If you were my lover, it might be another matter. . . . I am going. . . . Good-night."

When she had closed the door behind her, the young couple turned to each other, speechless. They felt catastrophe imminent, felt only that they could not even open their lips without wounding each other fatally. They would have liked to say nothing, but

despite themselves they were forced to go half-way to meet these new tribulations which threatened them. There followed cruel moments, moments full of mistrust and anxiety. Caught by the desperate astonishment with which this unforeseeable attack of misfortune had caused him, Guillaume waited with a resignation fraught with fear. He had left a Madeleine at peace, a smiling Madeleine, dreaming of a future of affection. He returned to find a Madeleine quivering all over, her nerves on edge, her eyes fixed on him with a look of implacable hardness. The difficulty which he felt in explaining this rapid change merely increased his alarm, giving him a foretaste of the frightful shock which was clearly about to assail him. He went closer to his wife, making an effort to soothe her, charging his glance with all the merciful gentleness which still filled him. But these two scenes, following so swiftly one on another, had completely shattered her. Ten minutes was all that had been needed to bring all her past to life again. Now in her heart she had all the horror and all the chill of the ghosts of both Jacques and "Verdigris". From the moment that her former lover left the room, she had ceased to be concerned with what her husband might suffer, land her only thought was to find a way to escape from that revulsion of her whole being. Then the appearance of Louise had finally filled her with all the savage egoism of mental torture. In the storm of rage in her soul there was one single clear thought: "Since I am such a low creature, since there is no forgiveness for me, let me be crushed by everything, let me be what Heaven wants me to be!"

She was the first to speak.

"We have been cowardly," she said, sharply, to Guillaume.

"Whyever do you say that?" he asked.

She shook her head scornfully.

"We ought never to have run away as if we were guilty. We should have been strong in our rights, by reason of our five years of love. . . . Now the time to fight has gone, we are defeated, our peace is dead."

He wanted to know everything. He insisted:

"But whatever has happened, my dearest?"

"Cannot you guess?" she cried. "Didn't you see that poor, degraded woman? She recalled to me that past which suffocates me and I try in vain to forget."

"Yes, but now she has gone. You can be at rest again. There is nothing in common between you and her. And I love you."

Madeleine gave a brittle laugh, then, shrugging her shoulders, she replied:

"Nothing in common? I wish you had been there. She would have told you that if you had not picked me up out of the gutter, it is I who would be walking the Paris streets tonight."

"Do be quiet, my dearest, don't say such things. This is bad of you; you ought not sully our love so."

But she was worked up by the coarse words which she felt coming to her lips. It exasperated her to see her husband defending their affection for each other. With fury, she sought for crushing proofs of her infamy, to throw them in his face and stop these attempts to soothe her. But all that she could find to say was:

"I have seen Jacques!"

Guillaume did not at once grasp what she meant. He merely stared at her, dumbfounded.

"Jacques was here just now," she continued. "Talking tenderly to me. Wanting to kiss me."

She glared at her husband. The colour left his cheeks. He sat back against the table, stammering: "Jacques has gone to Toulon."

"Oh no, he hasn't. He put up in this hotel. I have seen him."

"Is that man everywhere?" cried Guillaume, in a burst of rage and dismay.

"He damn-well is," replied Madeleine, with an imperious gesture of certitude. "Did you really think you could kill the past? Upon my word, you thinking this bedroom was a secluded nook, a lost corner where nobody could come between us! Just now you were telling me how alone we were, out of this world, you said, above it all, far from it all, here we were going to spend such a night of peaceful love. Well, let me tell you, the silence and security of this room were false, there was anguish lurking in wait for us in this unknown lodging where we were only going to spend a few hours."

Defeated, staring at the ground, he heard her out, powerless to halt that furious flow of words.

"And I was foolish enough," she continued, "to think there was any place where we could forget. I was lulled by your dreams. . . . The truth is, Guillaume, there is nowhere now where you and I could be alone. Vain for us to take flight, try to hide ourselves. However hidden the place, fate would know and wait for us there, and my disgrace would drive us to madness. The fact is, I bear our torment in my person, now it only needs a mere breath of air to re-open my wounds. Get it into your head, Guillaume, we are

harried like wounded beasts, vainly seeking shelter from thicket to thicket, to end up as carrion in a ditch."

For a moment she paused, then, more worked up than ever, went on: "It is our fault, I tell you, we should never have been such cowards as to run away. Remember what I said when we left *Noiraude*, yesterday evening, when Jacques came—I said memories were set free which would pursue me. That is the shrieking mob that tracks us down and besets us. I can hear them racing madly after me, I can feel them now, snapping at me, I can feel their claws tear at my flesh. Oh, what hell it is! My memories are tearing me to pieces!"

As she uttered these words, in a shrill voice, she pressed her hands to her bosom, as if she had indeed felt the teeth of a hound bury themselves in the soft flesh. Worn out by suffering, Guillaume was now filled with irritated impatience by his wife's cruel words. The bitter delight she was taking in this rebellion of hers cut at his sensitivity, wounded his need for calm, and his nerves too were on edge. He would have liked to make her keep silent. He still felt that he should try yet again to calm her, but he only tried feebly.

"We shall forget it all," he said. "We shall go and find happiness farther away."

She began to laugh. Twisting her hands, she thrust her white face forward at him.

"What?" came her cry. "Do you think I can come up like this against something at every step and remain calm and healthy? I am not strong enough. I know I am not. I must have peace, or I shall go out of my mind."

"Come," he said, "don't get so worked up." He tried again, going up to her and trying to put his arms about her. "Can't you see how painful all this is to me. Do spare me. Let us end this cruel scene. . . . Tomorrow, when we are both of us calmer, we may be able to find a way to be healed. . . . It is late now. Let us go to bed.'

He had lost hope, all he wanted was to get right away now into the darkness and silence of the night. It seemed to him that he would suffer less when he was stretched out between the sheets and, the candle out, he no longer heard Madeleine's staccato words. He went to the bed, drew aside the curtains, and opened the bedclothes. Madeleine, still leaning against the chiffonier, watched him do this, a strange look in her eyes. When the bed was opened and she saw the dazzling whiteness of the linen, she said:

"I am not going to bed. . . . Never can I get into that bed with you."

She pointed meaningfully at the bed. Guillaume staggered back and leant against the table again. Utterly crushed, he said not a word, and this time he resigned himself to the cruel whim of fate. In a fashion which was all too cruel, everything struck at him.

"You must not hold it against me if I tell you the truth," Madeleine went on, harshly. "I am saving you from the final degradation. I am sure you don't want to embrace me in the same bed where Jacques has already possessed me, do you? It would bring us both horrible dreams. I might die of sheer disgust."

The name of her first lover, now on her lips a second time, reminded him of her recent meeting with Jacques. Her head whirled. She could only think by sudden leaps.

"I saw him here only a moment ago," she said. "He mocked me and insulted me. To him I am only a miserable light-o'-love, a light-o'-love whom he has the right to insult. He does not know that I am now a respected woman. He has never seen me on your arm. . . . For a moment I wanted to tell him the truth. But I had not the strength. . . . Do you know why not, why I let him talk familiarly to me and mock me? No, but I cannot tell you such a thing. Yet why should I hide it? You must know everything, then you will stop talking to me of being cured. . . . Jacques suspected me of bringing another lover to this room, merely to enjoy a dirty pleasure by evoking the past."

Guillaume did not even quiver once, he merely shrank, becoming limp under her blows. After a brief silence, she whispered:

"You see, Guillaume, I know this room only too well. There, now you have it. . . ."

At last she came away from the chiffonier against which all this time she had found support, and stood in the centre of the room. There, savage in her silence, her bosom swollen with the thunder she was forcing back, she glared about her slowly, with frightful stare. Guillaume had raised his head and was aghast now at the expression in her eyes. But he could not prevent himself saying:

"Madeleine, you frighten me. . . . Don't look at these walls so!"

She shook her head and went on turning this way and that, peering at every object from a distance.

"I know them all, I know them all," she kept repeating, in a sort of low chant. "Oh, my poor head will burst. Can't you see, you must forgive me. The words come to my lips in spite of myself.

I do try to stop them but I can feel them escaping. I am full of the past. . . . What a frightful thing memory is. . . . Have mercy on me, kill it, kill my power to think!"

Raising her voice, she cried: "I would like never to think again, to be dead, or to live on in madness. . . . Oh, if only I could lose my memory and live on as a thing, never hear this frightful sound of memories in my head! That is beyond my will. My thoughts gripe me incessantly, they flow in the blood of my veins, I hear them beating at every finger-tip. . . . Forgive me, Guillaume, I can keep silent no longer."

She took a few steps forward, so distraught in appearance that Guillaume really did have the impression that she was going out of her mind. He held out his hands to her, calling to her, trying to halt her.

"Madeleine, Madeleine," he implored.

But she did not heed him. She came close to the wall opposite the hearth, still repeating: "No, no more thought, all I think is horrible and I think out loud. . . . I recognize every thing in this place."

Raising her eyes, she contemplated the wall which rose before her. The advent of Jacques, the man sight of whom stirred such profound emotions in her, had brought body and mind alike to a critical climacteric. Up to now this inward conflict had steadily grown fiercer. Now it roused her to frenzy, prompting a strange hallucination. Oblivious of the presence of her husband, Madeleine was so full of the past that she felt herself back in those long-past days. Her normal state of *sang-froid* had been thrust aside by a burning fever. The least of the objects about her brought her such a póignant, unbearable sensation that her nerves lost control and the least impression was torn from her in wild cries and babbling. She re-lived the hours spent here with Jacques and, just as she said, despite herself, she re-lived them out loud, as if she were all alone.

The blazing fire cast huge lurid patches of light on the walls. The isolated shadow of Guillaume, still seated on the table, spread dark and immense to the ceiling. Every other part of the room, even the remotest corner, was brightly lighted now. The opened bed glared white, the furniture was outlined with gleaming lines of light, blazing hearths flickering in every pane of their glass. The colours of the pictures were raw. Pyramus and Thisbe's red and yellow garments stained the paper with blotches of gold and of blood. The spun glass clock with its fragile mansion was all ablaze with light,

from cellar to attic, as if the dolls now abed in its rooms had been giving a grand party. And through this flood of brilliance moved Madeleine, brushing her brown travelling-gown against the furniture, her features lifeless and bloodless, her auburn hair aglow, her steps spasmodic as she prowled around the walls. One by one she examined those paintings telling of the unhappy love of Pyramus and Thisbe.

"There ought to be eight," she cried. "Jacques and I counted them together. I climbed on to a chair and read him out the stories written underneath. It seemed such a funny tale. He roared with laughter at the bad grammar and clumsy style. . . . I remember how his laughter annoyed me. I found the story of that love innocently full of delightful simplicity. . . . Ah, there's the wall which separated the lovers, and the crack through which they told each other their love. Isn't it delightful, this wall with its gap, the obstacle which could never stop their two hearts. Then what a frightful ending! Here's the one in which Thisbe finds Pyramus wallowing in his own blood, when the poor boy thought his mistress had been eaten by the lioness and stabbed himself. And when Thisbe found him dead, she killed herself in turn and flung herself down on his body to die with him. . . . I said I would like to die like that, and Jacques laughed at me. 'If you found me dead,' I asked him, 'what would you do?' He just took me in his arms, kissed me and laughed louder than ever as he said: 'Kiss you like this, kiss your lips hard, bring you back to life.' "

Guillaume stood up, feverish with sombre exasperation. These musings, these scenes which his wife spread before him, caused him unbearable anguish. If only he could seal her lips! He took her by the hands and led her to the centre of the room.

"Stop," he cried, "stop saying these things! Have you forgotten I am here? Madeleine, you are too cruel."

She slipped from his grasp and ran to the window, where she drew aside one of the little muslin curtains. "I remember," she said, "this window opens on to the yard. Yes, I recognize it all, a mere ray of moonlight is enough. . . . There is that red-brick dovecote. In the evening I had stood there with Jacques, watching the birds flying in to roost, perching for a while on the eaves of the cote to preen, before they disappeared one by one through those little round openings, billing each other, with sad little cries. . . . And there is that yellow stable door which was wide open. We could hear the horses breathing and flocks of poultry came clucking

in, to scratch in the straw and scatter the chaff outside. . . . It might be but yesterday. The first two days, I had to stay in bed, I was shivering with fever. Then, when I was able to get up, I went to this window and thought the outlook, on walls and roofs, very dismal. But I love animals and for hours on end I enjoyed the clucking of those hens and the loving caresses of the pigeons. . . . while Jacques walked up and down, smoking. When I laughed and called him across to look at a young pullet racing about with a worm in its beak and all the others chasing it to try to get a piece, he came to me and leant out, with his arm tight about my waist. . . . He had invented a trick of running his lips over my neck with quick, light little kisses so that it sounded like a continuous clucking of pullets. 'I'll play pullets,' he used to joke. . . ."

"Stop," cried Guillaume, fiercely. "Stop, Madeleine!"

She left the window. Now she stood by the bed, examining it with a peculiar expression.

"It was in the summer," she murmured. "The nights were very hot. The two first nights, Jacques put a mattress on the floor and slept there. When I was better, we put the mattress back on the bed, but when we got into bed together, we found it all lumps and Jacques laughed and said that we could put twenty such mattresses one on top of the other without making our bed any softer. . . . We left the window ajar and so as to have a breath of air, drew these blue bed curtains aside. These are the very ones, look, that's where I made a tear with a hair-pin. . . . I wasn't exactly a little one and Jacques being no weakling either, we found the bed rather tight."

Beside himself, Guillaume stood between her and that bed, then urged her back towards the hearth. He felt a frightful longing to take her throat in his hands, to thrust his fists into her mouth, to force her to keep quiet.

"She's going mad. But I can't strike her," he muttered. "She's going mad."

Slowly backing, she reached the table, staring stupidly all the time at her husband's pale features. When she came up against the table, she swung quickly round and began to look for something. To and fro over the greasy wood she held the glimmering candle, examining every stain.

"Wait, wait," she whispered, "I am sure I wrote something here. . . . It was the evening before we left, Jacques was reading and I was tired of being left alone. I stuck my little finger in the

ink-well I saw there and wrote something on this table. . . . Yes, I shall find it, it was certainly marked, so nothing would rub it out. . . ."

She turned right round and bent down to see more closely. After a few instants, she uttered a triumphant cry.

"I knew I was right," she said, "look, read it: *I love Jacques.*"

While this search went on, Guillaume had been racking his brain to think of the most gentle way in which he might silence her tongue. All his pride, all his male dignity, was wounded to the core, till he felt an irrepressible need to be brutal with her. Despite himself, his fists clenched, he raised his arms, and if he did not strike her, it was because he had still not entirely lost his head and the glimmer of reason still alive in him rebelled at the thought of striking a woman. But when he heard her read out those words *I love Jacques*, instilling into them all the passion she had felt at that time, he reared at her back, both fists in the air, as if at last about to strike her down.

It was like a flash of lightning. With a vague sense of premonition, she swung round.

"That's it," she cried. "Beat me. . . . I want you to beat me!"

Had she not turned round, there is no doubt but that Guillaume would have brought his fists down on her. That enormous bun of flaming hair, that shameless neck, on which he seemed to trace the red imprint of those kisses of Jacques', outraged him and made him pitiless. But the moment he beheld her face, so delicate, so pale, he was seized at once with pity and stood back from her with a gesture of utter hopelessness.

"Why hold back like that?" she cried. "Can't you see I am out of my mind, you should treat me like a beast."

She burst into tears, and weeping thus immediately reduced her hysteria. Throughout this strange hallucination, by which she had re-lived those former days, she had felt her bosom bursting with tears.

Had she been able to weep freely, she would never have spoken. Now that her anguish and rage flowed from her in hot tears, she gradually came back to herself. She felt her whole being relax, and understood all the cruelty of her madness. She had the impression of coming out of a nightmare during which out loud she had recited all the terrible things which had filled her disordered brain. Now she was astounded, and full of guilt, because of the words which

had slipped from her tongue. For she could never take them back, nor Guillaume ever forget them. From now on between them would rise the barrier of the memories of that room, all the live reality of an episode in her love liaison with Jacques.

Beside herself now and terrified by the thought that she herself was to blame for blurting all this out without Guillaume ever seeking confession, she went to him, hands clasped, pleading. He had sunk to a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"I have hurt you," she stammered. "I said things that have made your heart bleed. . . . I do not know what made me tell you all that. I was out of my mind. . . . I am not really so evil. Just think of other nights when all was glorious. . . . I had forgotten all this past and thought myself worthy of you. . . . Oh, how I have loved you, Guillaume! And love you still! I dare not swear to you that I have never ceased loving you, because I am too well aware you would not believe me, but yet it is true. . . . In this place those memories took hold of my throat and would have suffocated me had I not spoken."

He said nothing. An abyss of unlimited despair had swallowed him up.

"Well," Madeleine went on, "isn't it clear? It is to me. It's all finished between you and me. It only remains for me to vanish from the scene. . . . Death should be sweet."

He raised his head.

"Death?" he whispered, "so soon, death? . . . Oh no, it cannot all be over."

Shaken by this notion of seeing her dead, he gazed at his wife. He had no more hope, he felt wounds which would never heal, but all this over-susceptibility shrank back in fear from any brutal, sudden end to their drama. If he still wanted to live, this was not from any dream of trying his happiness again, but because he unconsciously felt a sort of bitter pleasure in suffering from this love which had formerly been the delight of his life. Once buried, he would no longer be able to feel even Madeleine's blows.

"Now, be frank!" she cried, at this instant, with all her normal vigour of voice. "Don't be afraid to be cruel. Did I spare you? From now on a man stands between us. . . . Could you bring yourself to embrace me now, my dear?"

A silence followed.

"You see, you do not reply," she continued. "Flight is out of the question. I have no longer any thought of risking meeting women

in rags on the highroads who can address me familiarly, I refuse ever again to put up in public inns where I may run the risk of reviving nights that were once dead. . . . Far better end it all at once."

She strode nervously up and down the room, vaguely looking for some means to kill herself. Guillaume followed her with his eyes and could find nothing to say. Had she tried to commit suicide at that moment, he would have let her. Suddenly, she stood still. Thought of her child had come into her mind. But she was not going to let her husband know what had held her back. All she said was:

"Listen, my dear, promise you will not try to prevent me dying if ever our life becomes unbearable. . . . Will you?"

With a movement of his head, he promised. Then he rose to his feet and took his hat.

"You would rather not stay here till morning?" she asked.

"No," he replied, and a faint shudder ran through him. "We will go at once."

When they had gathered their things together, they gave a last look at the room. The fire was dying, the sheets of the open bed rose-hued with it. The pictures of the love-life of Pyramus and Thisbe were now only black patches on the walls. The spun glass clock case was a bluish shape in the shadows. Husband and wife told themselves that they had entered this place with hope in their hearts, to leave it in despair. Once out in the corridor, they involuntarily tiptoed cautiously. Jacques might have heard them leaving. Instinctively, at the end of the corridor, Madeleine even peered back.

When they reached the yard, they had to get the ostler out of bed. He appeared at last, in very bad humour. It was two hours after midnight, and this sudden departure seemed most extraordinary to him. Then it occurred to him that the two gentlemen and Madame Madeleine must have had a jealous show-down. That made him forget his anger. When they were in their brougham, he cried "*Bon voyage*" to them with a rascally leer and added "And *au revoir* to you, Madame Madeleine!"

Madeleine began weeping softly. Guillaume gave the mare her head and of herself she took the *Noiraude* road.

They completely forgot that they had set out to go to Paris. Now they preferred to hide at *Noiraude*, to lick their wounds in the calm and silence of the old mansion. Thus, mechanically, they

retraced their steps, like mortally wounded beasts dragging themselves back to their lair, to die there in peace. It was an agonizing return journey. The countryside stretched more sinister than ever under the slanting rays of the moon, which threw enormously long shadows on the road, white with hoar frost. Without being aware he was doing so, from time to time Guillaume gave the mare a faint click with his tongue. Once again Madeleine fastened her attention dully on the yellowish glimmer of the headlamp light flicking ahead along the ditches. Towards daybreak the cold became so fierce that her hands under the yellow rug tingled with it.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

At *Noiraude* the de Viargues resumed their dead existence, shut away again in the silent shadows of the enormous living-room. But their solitude now lacked that smiling peace it had once known. It was dismal, fraught with despair. But a few days since they had spent the whole day in the inglenook without even the need to speak, happy enough merely to exchange blissful glances but now with crushing tedium mingled with vague apprehension their long, mute sessions together there oppressed them. Nothing in their life seemed changed. They had the same tranquillity, the same clock-like regularity, the same drowsy isolation. But now their hearts were sealed, their eyes never met each other's with that exquisite sweetness they had known before, and that was enough to turn all about them to ice. The vast black room had become funereal, within it they dwelt in a continual state of nerves. The dingy light of winter filled them with gloom, as if they were at the bottom of a pit. Sometimes they would rise from their chairs and go to the window, to stare glumly out at the bare trunks of the park trees, then with sudden shiver they turned back again, to warm at least their cold hands at the blazing fire in the hearth.

Never a word was spoken between them about the tangle of events which had broken them. Their rare exchanges of conversation were trivial and empty. They shrank back into their dull misery and did not even feel strong enough to brood clearly over their sufferings. The crisis which had closed in on them at the *White Hart* seemed to have filled them with a stupor devoid of any courage. They had emerged from it with minds sickened and bodies lifeless, sinking to a state of dull stupefaction in that sombre peace which engulfed them. When a scalding memory did suddenly interrupt their apathy, they would tell themselves that they had another month to go. Jacques had left them in peace so long, they could still drowse on, until his return. Thus they sank back again into their state of torpidity, craving for obfuscation, their livelong day preoccupied with puerilities, fires which would not draw, what the weather promised, or what should be ordered for dinner.

They buried themselves in a life which was purely animal. Yet

in health they were well enough. Madeleine even put on flesh, her cheeks filling out, so that she assumed the puffy pallor of a woman in a nunnery. She also became rather greedy, and found tremendous pleasure in the purely physical delights. Like her, Guillaume too surrendered himself to that animalization which suffering brought, swallowing up whole hours of time in such tasks as efforts to retrieve fragments of glowing wood coal with the tongs, merely to tuck them back behind the fresh logs piled on the fire.

This month of somnolence which the young couple had before them, they felt would never end, and they would have been prepared to spend the rest of their days in this imbecile state which had infected them. Particularly during the first few days, they enjoyed the great peace of it. But that state of stupefaction could not last. Soon enough it was shot through with sudden poignant twinges of consciousness. The least trifle snatching them from their state of abandonment caused them immense anguish. Geneviève was not slow to torment them. She was the first to thrust them back into their sufferings. Towering over Madeleine, she annihilated her by her mere presence. Toughened by her own life of abstinence and labour, the fanatical old woman was now merciless towards this other who had sinned. The mere thought of the body's enjoyment brought her to frenzy, since all her life had been one of ferocious virginity. Hence she never could forgive the younger woman a life in which there had been love, or forget those tremors of body's supreme delight, from which the bloom on that mother-of-pearl skin seemed to her still to be a-quiver. Geneviève never saw Madeleine but as a woman of evil slipping straight from the embrace of Jacques to that of Guillaume, and that double yielding of her body to a man seemed to her to be Hell's own prostitution, Hell's own craving for foul debauch. She had anyway never liked Madeleine. Now she devoted herself to detestation of the younger woman with a scorn laced with horror. This powerfully-built young body, white of skin, with its auburn mass of hair, terrified her, as if Madeleine were a gaping jaw, thirsty for the blood of young men, so that even though she did all she could to crush Madeleine with her hatred, yet she was apprehensive of her, ever on the defensive, as if afraid lest Madeleine should leap at her own throat. She would not have hated Satan himself any more, nor taken greater precautions against him.

Geneviève nevertheless continued to share the young couple's daily life, always taking her meals with them and spending her

evenings in their company. Her stiff, threatening bearing was a constant protest. She treated them as guilty persons, looking on them with the eyes of an implacable judge, at every whip and turn showing them the disgust and anger which their union caused. Above all, she strove to make Madeleine feel how much she despised her. If the young woman touched anything, Geneviève at once avoided making any more use of it, in a desire thereby to show that it was befouled. Every evening she would diligently chant from her big Bible, and when Guillaume did request her to take her readings to her own room, indicated to him that these readings of hers from holy writ chased Satan away and purified the living-room. She was pig-headed enough to stay there till bedtime, filling the shadows with her gloomy mumble, and as the days went by, those readings became louder. She selected the most blood-thirsty passages, those stories in which guilty women were chastised. The destruction of Sodom by fire and the mad dogs devouring Jezebel's bowels were constantly on her lips. When she read these stories, she would with cruel pleasure also subject Madeleine to the glare of her malevolent eyes. There were even days when to the text she added her own thoughts, threatening with frightful torments a "female criminal" whom she never named, but whom she indicated with her eyes. In those hoarsely mumbled improvizations she outlined the tortures of Hell, cauldrons of boiling oil, devils with long crooks turning on the spit the bodies of the condemned, torrents of fire raining down for eternity, rain of fire dripping endlessly and slow, every drop bringing new scars to the backs of the crowds howling in the gulf below. Next, she would call on the Almighty to deal out prompt justice, begging him not to let a single guilty person escape, but as soon as possible to cleanse this earth of its foulness.

Madeleine tried not to hear, but despite her that mumbled mutter filled her ears, till in the end she who before this had never found any belief possible, became superstitious. She even came to have troubled moments when it seemed to her that the Hell and torture chambers of which this old fanatic expounded the terrible sight, really did exist. From then on, she lived in a sweat of anguish, a sweat which drenched her body whenever the thought of death came to her. She believed herself to be guilty, for ever condemned. Thus, using every day now to get her to feel the horror of her crime and the cruelty of the punishment which Heaven held in store for her, the old woman disturbed her reason to such a point as to inspire in her the most infantile of notions. She no longer knew

herself, thinking of the Devil now in the same way that she had thought of bogey-men when she was a little girl, telling herself that she was indeed an infamous creature, that Geneviève was quite right to treat her as a sinner, that with her mere presence she sullied this house, that she merited the greatest tortures of all. After that she listened to those evening readings of the Protestant woman with crazy apprehension, persuading herself that in the sounds of the house about her she really did distinguish the clank of the tongs and the hissings of Hell-fire. She would tell herself that during that very night death would come to her, so that the next morning she would find herself tossing on a glowing grid.

However, she did not always suffer without rebellion those nightmares which Geneviève induced in her. There were occasions when it merely exasperated her to find the old woman ever merciless towards her. And then, when she saw the aged fingers thrust aside the slice of bread which she had cut or caught the mad-woman's granite-like stare, she would become blind with rage. For there were still outbursts of pride in her that enabled her to stand erect again, despite the Protestant maniac's constant thrusts, and in such moments she would tell herself that she was going to be mistress in her own house. Carried away by sheer rage, on one occasion she shouted at the old woman. "I'll turn you out of the house," she cried. "Leave this place at once! I will not have an old lunatic about!" Then, suddenly seeing Guillaume lower his eyes, afraid to utter a word, she swung round on him and added, fiercely: "What a coward you are. . . . You can't even have your own wife shown proper respect! If you still have any love for me, free me from this crazy old woman!"

Geneviève then leered with a peculiar smile and rose to her feet. Very erect, very stiff, she stared at Madeleine out of the circles of her deep-hollowed eye-sockets, with the hot coals within them.

"He is no coward," Geneviève croaked, in her dry voice. "He knows well enough that I insult nobody. . . . Why think you to rebel when you hear the voice of the Lord?"

With devilish delight on her countenance, she pointed to her Bible, then, seized in turn with frenzy, raising her voice, she cried:

"It is ever thus! She who sins would raise her head and snap at a decent woman. A fine thing it would be, indeed, were you to expel me from this house where I have worked for thirty years, seeing that you came into it to bring sin and tears. . . . Just compare us. I am nearly one hundred; I have grown old in devotion and

prayer. When I look back at my long life, I have not a sin on my conscience. And you think I should be weak before you and foolish enough an old woman to yield my place to you? Whence came you here and who are you? You are still young, but death already oozes from your pores. From evil you came, to punishment shall you go hence. . . . I can pronounce judgment to your face, I need never obey you."

These words Geneviève uttered with indomitable pride and deepest conviction, for she did indeed view Madeleine as a thief smuggled slyly into *Noiraude*, whence she had tried to steal respect and peace. Every one of these attacks drove the young woman to desperation.

"You shall go," she insisted, vigorously. "Am I the mistress here or am I not? It would indeed be funny if I had to leave my home to a serving woman."

"Well, I am not going," Geneviève replied, bluntly. "God brought me to this house to watch over my son Guillaume, and here I stay till the day when he shall be delivered from your arms and I see you annihilated by the wrath of the Lord."

This insistence, this piercing voice of the old woman, broke Madeleine's will. She weakened, for she could not leap at the old centenarian's throat, and knew no other way of getting rid of her. So, falling back to her chair, in agonizing tones she cried: "Oh what torment, what torment! Can't you see that by your continual persecution you are gradually killing me? Do you think I do not feel the ice in your eyes as they fasten on me? And every evening when you read I know very well you are merely reading to me. . . . You want me to repent, don't you?"

"Repentance is useless," cried Geneviève. "The Lord never forgives the crimes of the flesh."

"Then leave me to myself, stop talking to me of your Satan and your God, stop every evening giving me a nightmare which keeps me panting till daybreak. . . . You can stay here, I don't care, but I do not want to see you, spend your time somewhere else, I implore you, in another room. . . . Only last night with horrible delight you spoke of Hell, so that I spent a frightful night."

She shuddered. With a particular look of enjoyment, Geneviève watched the colour fade from Madeleine's cheeks.

"It is not I," she said, "who give you your nightmares. If you cannot sleep, that is because Satan is in your body and he torments you, the moment you put out your candle."

"You are mad," cried Madeleine, whiter than any sheet. "You are trying to frighten me, as if I were a child. . . . But I am not a fool, I don't believe your old nanny's tales."

"Oh, but there's no question about it," the old fanatic insisted, with all the conviction of one who sees visions, "you are possessed all right. . . . When you weep, I can see Satan puffing out that bosom of yours. Your nerve-ridden arms are all mad gestures. Satan is in their crazy posturing, and in the flesh of your cheeks when they jerk and twitch as they do. . . . Why, look, only look at your left hand at this instant, look at the way those fingers are drawn up. That is Satan working in you, that is Satan all right!" And with a wild cry, the old woman leapt back as if she had seen a loathsome creature.

Madeleine looked down at her hand. It was true. A nervous tremor was twitching at her fingers. She was silent, unable to find a word of anger or protest. 'Geneviève is right,' she told herself, 'it is not she that frightens me, it is something within me, something in my guilty body. At night, when I have nightmares, that is my memory choking me.'

After this she gave in, and accepted the presence of the old servant, for all their quarrels ended like that, with Madeleine more aghast than ever. She so lost her head that she confused Jacques, whom she always felt within her, and Satan, whom the old Protestant woman insisted she saw writhing under her skin. The scorn this old woman poured down on her and the pious horror she really seemed to experience at sight of her, drove her deep into bitter meditation. 'I really must be an infamous thing,' she told herself, 'when this old woman refuses to touch anything I make use of, and shudders at sight of me, as if I were a toad. She would gladly grind me under her heel. I must be a wretched thing indeed.' And she came to loathe herself and feel sick at the sight of her own milk-white body, even imagining that an acrid vapour rose from it. She came to see her beauty as a mask hiding a monstrous animal. When the religious follies of the old maniac had disturbed her mind to such point that she thus lost all clear sense of her own nature, she would huddle endlessly in a corner by herself, listening, wondering if she could not really hear the Devil moving within her.

Guillaume was of too timorous a nature to rescue her from Geneviève's hands. Thus by her age and by her pose of the vision-seeking prophetess, in a strange fashion the old woman ended by dominating them both. Guillaume would have given a great deal

to have the pluck to send her to live by herself in the lodge on the far side of the park, but he did not dare cross her in any way. She had nursed his father, and him too she had brought up from infancy. No, he could not turn her out. When she had those quarrels with Madeleine he made himself as small as he could, trying to avoid being crushed between these two women. It was in vain. The moment always came when one or other martyrised him, Madeleine reproaching him for allowing old Geneviève's tongue such liberty, Geneviève charging him with condemning himself to hell-fire by living with sin. Struck at by both sides and too weak to take a strong line, he used to beg them to be at peace and not make his life such cruel misery. The moment he saw them facing up to each other, the fear of hearing them come to words kept him on tenterhooks, and the moment the first biting words were spoken, he would go to the window and tap anxiously on the panes while the storm gathered over his head.

What finally drove husband and wife to absolute distraction was Geneviève's fixed idea of working for Guillaume's salvation. She would have liked to tear him from Madeleine's arms and exorcise him, so he at least should not go to Hell. She lent herself to that work of conversion with all the stubbornness of her character. At any moment she was able to find the means of returning to her fixed idea; the least trifle served as pretext.

"Listen to me, my son," she said once, for instance, "at night you should come to my room to say your prayers, as you used to do when you were little. Remember how you put your hands together and repeated the words after me? That would save you from the snares of Satan."

To this, Guillaume turned a deaf ear, which only made the old Protestant the more biting. And she did not mince words.

"Listen to me," she said, sternly, "you still have a chance of escaping Satan's claws. You are not sullied or condemned for ever. But take care, if you stay in the arms of that unclean woman, one of these nights she will carry you away into the pit. . . . A prayer would win back your soul. When you are on that woman's breast, if you would only three times say a prayer which I will teach you, she would utter one terrible shriek and fall to dust. Try, you will see."

All this time, Madeleine was at hand. She heard the old woman's words with terror. And Geneviève did recite the prayer which was to make her fall to dust. "Lubrica, daughter of Hell, go back to the flames whence thou camest for the damnation of men. May thy

skin blacken and thy flaming hair cover thy whole body with the hair of the beast. In the name of Him thought of whom consumes thee, in the name of God the Father, avaunt!"

Without doubt this incantation was of the old loony's own composition. She accompanied it with certain advice: it was to be said thrice, and every time, a cabalistic sign was to be made over the body of the unclean woman, the first time over the left breast, the second time over the right breast, the third time over the navel. It was after that third sign that the snow-white body was to be transformed to lowly dust.

Hearing these frightful ravings of old Geneviève, husband and wife felt they had brought to life an everlasting nightmare. This mixture of religion and sorcery in the end robbed them of any true sense of reality. Madeleine felt she had been drawn into a sort of hurricane of Hell and her once commonsense mind was undermined more every day by the blows this old woman dealt her. Like her, Guillaume led a frightful life, all nervous shock and animal terror. For a month they lived in this ghastly atmosphere, *Noiraude* filled with Geneviève's acts of exorcism. The psalm-singer tramped the long corridors, muttering prayers and often by night singing psalms, the lilt of which hovered lugubrious in the silence. One might have thought she had set her mind on making her master and mistress stark raving mad.

Husband and wife now had another cause for anguish. Little Lucie had begun to impress them both cruelly with that solemn pursing of the lips that made her like Jacques. Now the child had to spend all its time at *Noiraude*, since her nurse had gone into service with a family in the town. Guillaume dared not confess that his own child frightened him and ought to be sent far away. Instead, he tried to make himself forget she was there, for all that the child spent long days at their side in the big living-room.

Lucie scarcely ever played now. She would sit still on the floor, rigid and silent, like a little grown-up, reflecting. With the instinct that children have for affection, she understood that her father rejected her. She was scarcely three and a half and could not fathom why this was, but she certainly was aware that there was less warmth of love about her, and the lack of tenderness made her pine. Since she had frequently noticed that the child's noisy play upset her husband, Madeleine had so often told her sternly that she must be quiet that little Lucie had become a timorous little thing, who tiptoed about, afraid of making a sound. Her childish delight

in life had vanished, to give place to a scared meditativeness. Her favourite posture was to stay huddled up on the hearth, her little feet in her hands, rocking endlessly to and fro on her bottom. At other times she would be statuesque in her rigidity, staring into the flames. She must have been meditating on the chill which now surrounded her. No doubt her half-formed mind was lost in speculation on the great sorrows which caused her such undeserved unhappiness. Sometimes, without any obvious reason, she would emerge suddenly from such a reverie, raise her head and stare hard at Guillaume. Then she pursed her lips and frowned, with fixity examining her father, as if in an attempt to read on his face what he had against her. In such moments, Guillaume thought he saw Jacques, and he would get up and walk agitatedly up and down. Yet, even as he did this, he still felt the child's eyes fixed on him.

Whenever she thus emerged from one of those periods of absolute stillness, Lucie was like a little old woman. Her pale features wrinkled, and there was a peculiar solemnity about them. She seemed to be thinking of things beyond her age. Guillaume imagined that she understood it all, and guessed what estranged him from her. Those grown-up moments in the child and those eyes full of sad thoughts caused him a feeling he could not have described. It was as if at any moment he expected her to start arguing like a grown woman, speaking to him of her own likeness to Jacques.

Often enough, Lucie was not satisfied with merely watching her father. She would get up quietly, go up to him, and hold out her arms. "Take me, take me," she would repeat, her favourite request, as if prompted by that irresistible need for fondling which from time to time children feel. And as, when Guillaume did not bend down, she would insist, her little face would screw up, irritable with anger, and when her father had succeeded in avoiding the touch of her hands, she would rush to Madeleine, to fling herself weeping into her arms.

Madeleine suffered all the child's grief, but yet when she saw Lucie drooping was afraid to take her to her bosom and play with her, to draw her out of that lifeless resignation of a little martyr. She was afraid of irritating Guillaume. But when, rejected by her father, the child went to her to beg for consolation, she was never able to resist her longing to crush the child to her bosom, and with kisses she would wipe away the big, silent tears which welled from Lucie's eyes and take her for a little walk, whispering to her and for a few

moments trying to render her all the affection which she usually kept back from her.

One day, Guillaume had brushed the child aside rather roughly and Lucie ran sobbing to her mother. As soon as she was on Madeleine's knees, she said: "Daddy hit me. He's a bad man, I don't want him any more."

Already regretting his roughness, Guillaume went across to her.

"No, no," said Madeleine, as she dandled her to calm her, "look, your Daddy's here, and if you stop crying he will kiss you."

But the child flung her arms round her mother's neck in terror. Only when she thus felt secure did she look up, very gravely, at Guillaume.

"No, no," she said, "I don't know him any more."

And the child made a little pouting gesture of disgust which made husband and wife exchange a strange glance. Guillaume's eyes said to Madeleine: 'See for yourself, she refuses to be my daughter, in her veins she has blood which is not mine.'

Thus the presence of that poor little soul was for them both a continual cause of anguish. It made them feel that Jacques was always there, at their side. They tortured each other, lending the most childish trifles tremendous significance of terror and pain. Above all it was Guillaume who seemed to find horrible delight in inventing monstrosities. There were moments when he felt a burning desire to crush her to him and smooth out her features with his kisses, to make her entirely his own. He would watch her attentively, seeking out some trait of the little countenance which was like himself, so he could press his lips there. Then, gradually, as he saw the child shrink under his questing eyes, purse her lips and frown the more, he grew more morose. He lost himself in those earlier thoughts, telling himself that he was not the little one's only father.

He had given Madeleine all of himself, but all he had been able to obtain from her was a daughter already shaped by the love embraces of another. The sight of Lucie, who eyed him with the pensive eyes of a grown-up, and this notion that fortune had turned him into a mere instrument to assist the birth of a child who was really born of Jacques, together with his former affection for that person and the jealous hatred which had now taken possession of him, all together brought him to feel unbearable anguish, in a destructive rebellion of flesh and soul together.

'I am a dupe of life,' he reflected, bitterly. 'I have been robbed of everything: my body, my heart and my reason. Ceaselessly

circumstances and other people have tormented me. I have loved two people, Jacques and Madeleine, and at this very moment I am buffeted by them both. Finally, the last incredible agony they could cause me, they have stolen my child. My kisses served to resurrect Jacques, to place Lucie and him between Madeleine and myself.'

Now another turn of fortune merely augmented all his miseries. One evening, crouching before the fire as usual, Lucie fell asleep, with her head against her mother's legs. She slept a restless sleep, shuddering and moaning. When Madeleine took her up to put her to bed, she noticed that the child's face was very red, and this frightened her. Suspecting that Lucie was threatened by some illness, she insisted on the child's cot being brought into the bedroom, where she had it put up close to her side. She told Guillaume to go to bed, while she watched. He did not sleep all night. He could not keep his eyes off his wife as with troubled solicitude she watched over Lucie.

Lighted by the dim light of a night-light, the room seemed vague and misty to him, as if in a dream. He no longer felt his own body. Eyes wide open, he lay there, lifeless, limp, as if in a lugubrious dream, his mind wandering.

Every time Madeleine bent over the cot, he thought he could see little Lucie lying there, dead, and a shadow rose above the body. Then, when the child tossed deliriously, he would feel astonishment to hear her still moaning. The death throes seemed to last for ever. This whole scene—his wife, anxious, silent, a white gown wrapped about her, bending over the shivering child with her flushed cheeks —in the uncertain glimmer of the night-light, amid the vast silence of the night, seemed more wretchedly desolate than anything he had ever known, yet he was powerless to rise and escape, forced to lie terrified, till at last day broke.

When, towards nine, the doctor came, it was to find Lucie in a very alarming condition. It was clearly smallpox, and from that instant, for days and nights on end Madeleine never left the child's side, but spent every minute at the bedside, having her own meals brought up to her there, though scarcely touching food, and only dozing an hour or two each night, on a chair, close at hand. For a week, Guillaume lived in a state of utter stupor, pacing up and down the living-room, halting stock-still in the corridors, to think things over, but never able to find a single clear thought in the void of his brain. Yet it was the nights which were most frightful. He would toss vainly to and fro in bed, only able towards morning to lose

himself in a feverish sleep, out of which the slightest moan from the child would waken him. Every evening, as he went to bed, he was afraid lest he should now see her die under his gaze. The atmosphere of the room, with its odour of medicaments, stifled him. The thought of the poor little thing suffering at his side caused him never-ending anguish and kept his nerves on edge. Had he been able to read the depths of his own mind, he would have wept from shame and anger. Without realizing it, he was outraged by Madeleine, who seemed oblivious of his very existence, outraged because she was so absorbed in the fate of this child whose features left them no peace of mind. Was she tending the child so devotedly merely because Lucie was like Jacques? Was anxiety to preserve this little face which was a living portrait of her former lover the motive? He whispered to himself that had Lucie resembled him, Madeleine would have been less concerned about her. To himself, he never clearly admitted these atrocious ideas, they tormented him but vaguely. One day, however, when he was alone in the living-room, it suddenly occurred to him to wonder what he would feel, were Madeleine suddenly to come down to tell him that Lucie had just passed away, and his whole being told him that such news would afford him immense relief. After that, he no longer knew himself. He seemed in his own heart to have found the ferocity of a murderer. He had come now to wishing the death of his daughter. Like that, tomorrow he might even kill her. Thus his state of stupor was shot through with crazy attacks of madness.

Geneviève, with her attitude of implacable judge, merely increased his anguish. From the first days of Lucie's sickness the old woman had insisted on going to the bedroom where the child lay gasping, there to predict her death, muttering that Heaven was going to snatch her from her parents to punish them for their sins. She was incapable of doing a thing to help Madeleine with her nursing, even so little as pouring out a dose of medicine or raising the child's head, without bringing out some threatening word. In the end Madeleine was so exasperated by this endless talk of death and punishment that she did turn the old thing out and forbid her ever to return. Then the old woman hovered lugubriously about Guillaume, and the moment she could get hold of him, in a corridor or in the living-room, would hold him endlessly with her ravings, telling him that it was the hand of the Lord striking at his daughter, his own punishment was reserved for later. He would eventually escape from the old woman's clutches in a state of utter collapse.

Afraid to stay in the bedroom and afraid alike to leave it because of the old fanatic lurking in wait for him, Guillaume no longer knew what to do with himself throughout the day. In her delirium Lucie was continually calling for her Papa, and there was a strange note in her voice which was heart-rending to him. 'Is she really calling me?' he would ask himself, and go up to the child's cot and bend down over it. Lucie would stare up at him, her staring eyes clouded with fever and terribly fixed. Then, suddenly turning aside, she would stare at some other point in the room, still calling "Papa! Daddy?" more and more breathlessly. And Guillaume would think: 'It is not to me she holds out her arms, it is not to me she is calling.' There were other moments when in her fever Lucie smiled. Then all violence left her. Instead, she babbled sweetly, though her words were interrupted every now and then by a faint stifled moan. From under the clothes she thrust her thin little, doll-like arms, waving them feebly, as if seeking invisible toys. It was heart-rending to see. Trying to keep her covered up, Madeleine cried. But Lucie would not rest, she kept sitting up, babbling all the time, nonsense words, till Guillaume could no longer bear it, and would have run from the room, had Madeleine not stopped him.

"Please don't go," she implored him. "Lucie never stops calling for you, you had better be at hand."

And he stayed. The feeble, heart-rending delirium of the little one now tormented him. From the moment that smallpox had been diagnosed, he had taken a peculiar interest in the ravages of the complaint on the child's face. First the sores appeared on her forehead and her cheeks, then she was almost entirely covered by them. But the flood of suppurating pustules freakishly stopped short of her eyes and her mouth, till it was like a frightful mask, through holes in which one could see the delicate lips and gentle eyes of an infant. Guillaume could not help wondering whether those smallpox scars would not result in the erasure of that resemblance to Jacques from the distorted face, but through those holes in the mask he still seemed to distinguish the likeness of Madeleine's first lover. And then, as the disease reached its peak, with uncontrollable delight he observed that the resemblance was fading out. This calmed his nerves and he found it easier to stay in the sickroom.

At last the morning came when the doctor pronounced the little one out of danger. Madeleine could have fallen on his hands with kisses. For a week she had felt life was not worth living. Lucie's recovery was slow. A sullen uneasiness once more took possession

of Guillaume. All over again, he began to study his little daughter's face, and as, one by one, the pustules disappeared, he felt a fresh stab at heart, for little by little, the lips and the eyes, which towards the end had also been covered with sores, became free, and he told himself that now for a second time he was going to see Jacques rise from the dead. He could only hope against hope that he was wrong. One day, as he accompanied the doctor from the sickroom, he put the question to him—did he think the child's face would be scarred? But though he asked this in a very low voice, Madeleine heard him. Very pale, she joined him in the doorway. "Do not worry," she then heard the doctor reply. "I think I can assure you that the spots will leave no trace." And Guillaume was clearly struck with regret and disappointment.

Madeleine shot him a piercing glance of reproof. Her eyes spoke words: would he then have preferred to disfigure his child, merely to spare his own sick nerves?

Eyes downcast, Guillaume sank into one of those desperate fits of tactiturnity which now took possession of him whenever he caught himself at such savage egoistic thoughts. For he now felt himself day by day less able to bear his own suffering.

Little Lucie's cot was kept in the parents' bedroom for another fortnight, but gradually she recovered, and the doctor's hopes were realized: there were no marks at all left on her face. But now Guillaume no longer could bring himself to look at his daughter. Apart from that resemblance to Jacques, he had latterly discovered a new cause for anguish. His uneasy soul seemed to find a ferocious pleasure in self-torment and the exaggeration of the merest trifles. Having one day noticed Madeleine make a gesture which reminded him of the way Jacques when talking would keep thrusting one hand forward, he had begun also to observe Madeleine very closely, studying every movement she made, every inflection of her voice, and it was not long before he had persuaded himself that she had herself caught something of the very mannerisms of her former lover. This discovery was a terrible blow to him.

It was not imagination, either, for there really were moments when Madeleine's little mannerisms did resemble those of Jacques. In those old days, when she had shared the young surgeon's life, constantly in close contact with him, she had allowed herself to be guided by his tastes and his tricks of behaviour. For a whole year she had thus been the recipient of a sort of physical education from him which had shaped her after his fashion. She had repeated his

pet words and, without realizing it, imitated his constant gestures, even the inflections of his voice. The gift for mimicry which in due course gives any woman the tricks of voice and bearing of the man in whose arms she lives, had brought her to the point even of changing some of her facial features, till she had acquired Jacques' customary expression. This, after all, was no more than the natural consequence of the physiological conditioning of their union. Bringing her virginity to maturity, making her his for life, out of the maid who had come to him Jacques had shaped an adult woman, stamping her with his own form. Madeleine had at the time been in the full flower of her adolescence. Her limbs, her features, even her glance and her smile were then in a state of flux, and they now grew fuller under the action of that new blood with which the young surgeon infused her. She became one of his race, shaped after his fashion.

When later he abandoned her, though still his wife, his blood, for ever mastered, she unlearned his gestures and voice inflections, while Guillaume's embraces nearly completed the obliteration from her face of those traits of Jacques. Five years of oblivion and peace had lulled to sleep that other blood in her veins. But ever since Jacques' return that blood had been reawakened. Despite her will, thought of her former lover and fear of meeting him, amounting to obsession, had ended in Madeleine's assuming those movements of Jacques', those inflections, those facial features of the past. It was as if all her former love union was coming out on her skin. Living at *Noiraude*, she had begun now to walk, speak and live as she had once walked, spoken and lived in Soufflot Street, when she was Jacques' submissive mistress.

There were moments now when Guillaume quivered at the mere ring of a word as she pronounced it. As if he had expected to see his old friend, he would look up in real fright and stare into space, to behold not Jacques, but only his own wife, though with tricks of facial expression which recalled the surgeon's face. There were little ways of jerking the neck, and subtle shoulder movements, which Guillaume recognized. There were words which now came to her lips on all occasions which caused him sharp pangs, since he recalled having heard Jacques use them. She could no longer speak or move a limb without Guillaume's finding sound or movement eloquent of her first love. Now he could divine at last how soaked in that love she must have been.

Madeleine would have liked to deny this possession of her whole

being, deny that her very flesh, the least thing she did, could reveal to what extent she was Jacques' thing, that not only did she think exclusively of Jacques, but lived by him, factually lived in his eternal embrace. At every instant she confessed his absolute possession of her, confessed that she would always bear the mark of his kisses. Not for anything in the world would Guillaume now have taken her in his arms, now that in her he saw his dearest friend, his brother. In the end he, she and Jacques became one in his mind and he would have felt guilty of a crime against nature, had he taken her to him. Once, moreover, that he had admitted this certainty that Madeleine was turning back into Jacques' submissive spouse, he brooded deeply over the extraordinary transformation. Despite himself and the fact that this caused him frightful pangs, he now never took his eyes off his wife, but made himself witness of that reawakening, noting every fresh resemblance as it showed itself and those hour to hour observations nearly sent him out of his mind. Not only was his little daughter a likeness of the man mere thought of whom caused him such stinging smart, but fate would have his wife too an eloquent image of Jacques in voice and in gesture.

In this metamorphosis of her being Madeleine also reacquired her adolescent charms. That grave, sweet serenity with which five years of esteem and love had imbued her, was now dispelled again by the reawakened thrill of that former love. She lost that rose-hued dignity of countenance, that modesty and subtle charm of bearing, all that appearance of respectability which had latterly made of her a lady of the most select. She would be seen about the house for several mornings on end, unkempt, just as she had been in those Soufflot Street days, her auburn hair tumbling loose over her bosom, her house-gown billowing open, revealing her plump, snowy-white bosom, swollen firm with body's desire. She let herself go, in her talk mingling words she had never before uttered at *Noiraude*, and made gestures which she had learned from the girls she had once associated with, and thus without even noticing it she allowed her memories to cheapen her. All this tendency of Madeleine to change back into a common hussy, Guillaume noticed with digusted apprehension. Seeing her now heavily rolling her hips as she walked, he found it impossible to recognize in this new, coarsened woman the healthy outdoor girl who for four years had been his wife. He now found himself tied in marriage with a female still foul with her unclean past. The forces of body's fatality had struck at Madeleine even close in his embrace, as if to demonstrate to him that

his kisses were too feeble to save her from the consequences of her earlier life.

It had been vain of Madeleine to think to lull herself to sleep with those dreams of peace, if at the first shock to her blood she was to wake again, and relapse into the shame which in those early days she had accepted and now must drain to the dregs. Even so, she no longer had a clear sense of herself, and failed even to see how far she had actually deteriorated. The only thing that really hurt her was that crude feeling that she was unable to drive Jacques out of her flesh. She no longer loved him and would have been happy to expel him altogether from her bosom, yet she never ceased to feel his dominating grasp. It was like a never-ending rape, which her spirit repulsed, but her body accepted, a rape from which no effort of will of hers could ever succeed in liberating her. This permanent conflict between her enslaved flesh and her longing to belong utterly to Guillaume was an endless cause of fevered horror. Straining her will to the very utmost, she would succeed in persuading herself she was at last free of the memory of that love, which was all that held her, and think that at last she could in absolute peace of mind yield to her husband's kisses, only a moment later to hear memory within her cry out with tyrannical voice and to fall prey to unlimited despair. In such moments she would give up the struggle, and allow the past to prostitute her in the present.

The thought of thus for ever being subject to the will of a man for whom she no longer felt any trace of affection, together with that clear sense that simultaneously she both loved Guillaume and deceived him, at every whip and turn, despite her will, inspired in her profound loathing for herself. She could not fathom these fatal physiological forces which withdrew her body from the control of her will. She was unable to comprehend that secret process of both blood and nerves which had made her Jacques' wife for life. Whenever she tried to work out her peculiar feelings, it was only to end by charging herself with perverse lusts, for she seemed utterly unable to love her husband and forget her lover too. Seeing that she hated Jacques and worshipped Guillaume, why did her involuntary imagination of Jacques' fondling her cause her such scalding delight, and why was she unable to show Guillaume all the tender love she felt for him? When she asked herself such insoluble questions, in which was locked the great misery of her existence, this extraordinary distorted sense of reality from which she suffered, she conceived the idea that she must be suffering from some horrible,

obscure disease, and Geneviève was right, there was Hell-fire in her bowels.

During the day she still fought back and did succeed in forgetting Jacques. Ceasing to cower in the inglenook, she busied herself about the house with one thing and another, and when there was nothing more to do, would chatter away feverishly about anything that came into her head, merely by the sound of her own words to deafen that memory. But by night she belonged entirely to her lover. No sooner did she begin to fall asleep, no sooner did her will relax in the hazy world of dreams, than her body gave way and those former loves were revived. Every evening she felt the nightmare return. It needed but a slight drowsiness to take possession of her wearied body for her to feel herself sinking back into Jacques' embrace. Not yet completely asleep, she would try to open her eyes or move her limbs, merely to dispel that vision, but she lacked the strength. The warmth of the bedclothes robbed all her sensations of their power to react, till at last they yielded more and more to the caresses she imagined herself to be receiving. Thus, all rebellion amid body's enjoyment, she would gradually sink into a fevered sleep. In this sleep she would make unbelievable efforts to break free from Jacques' embrace, only in the end, after vain struggles, to taste to the full the growth of body's supreme delight as this man, now alien to her, crushed her in his embrace. Now that she no longer had to sit by Lucie's sickbed, there was never a night without this evil dream. Then, waking suddenly, she would feel the scorching flush of shame flood into her cheeks, as Guillaume gazed at her and profound digust suffocated her. Then she would swear she would never sleep again, she would hold her eyes wide open, never again, close at Guillaume's side, to commit this adulterous act which sleep forced on her.

One night, hearing her moaning, Guillaume thought she must be ill. Sitting up in bed, he drew back a little, the better to see her features in the night-light's glimmer. They were alone in their bedroom this night, Lucie's cot having already been put back in the room next to theirs. Madeleine was now no longer groaning. Leaning over her, Guillaume anxiously peered at her features. By sitting up, he had drawn the bedclothes away and partially uncovered her bare shoulders. He then suddenly saw that mother-of-pearl skin ripple with an under-current of spasm, and the scarlet lips of the young woman who lay beside him were parted in a smile of great tenderness. Yet Madeleine was sound asleep. Suddenly, a nervous shock seemed to convulse her. She moaned again, but the moan was soft and

poignant. The skin of her bosom was faintly suffused with blood. Choking, she began to mutter. "Jacques, Jacques!" he heard in a low voice. She sighed faintly.

Pale, frozen at heart, Guillaume slipped from the bed. His bare feet sank into the thick pile of the rug. Stooping down, in the shelter of the bed-curtains, he saw Madeleine jerking. It gripped him with horror as if he had witnessed some monstrous perversity. For nearly two minutes, he gaped at her, unable to look away, listening despite himself to the young woman's mutterings. She had now thrown back the bedclothes and held her arms wide, continuously repeating that name, ever fainter, yet ever caressing.

It was too much; Guillaume was outraged. For a moment he felt he must strangle this wretched woman, so replete she was with the other man, so turgid with bodily lust. Laying his hand on one of her naked shoulders, he shook her roughly.

"Madeleine, Madeleine," he ground out. "Wake up!"

With a start, she came to herself. She was panting, running with perspiration.

"What is it? What has happened?" she stammered. She sat up and stared in wild terror about her. Then she saw her nakedness, and her husband, barefoot on the rug, his eyes fixed on her bosom, still quivering from love, and this told her all. She burst into tears.

Not a word was said between them. What could they have said? Guillaume had a mad impulse to let himself go, to treat his wife as the lowest of the low, as a loose woman befouling their marriage-bed. But he held himself in, feeling that to charge her with her dreams was beyond his powers.

Madeleine could have flogged herself. Had she not longed desperately to protect herself against this sin, of which only her sleep was guilty? But, unable to find the right words, and understanding that, however innocent she was, nothing could cleanse her in Guillaume's eyes, she sank into a rage of desperation. The least details of her nightmare came back clearly to her mind. She heard her own voice calling out to Jacques in her sleep. She relived through all the sighs and all the engulfing spasm of the love embrace. This she had done, and Guillaume there, Guillaume listening, Guillaume watching! What shame, what disgrace!

Her husband had now crept back into bed. He stretched out on the very edge, avoiding any contact with her. Arms folded behind his head, he stared up at the ceiling and seemed to be lost in cruel meditation. Still sitting up, she sobbed, and could not stop. She had

covered her shoulders, and from an instinctive need for decency had knotted her auburn hair at the back of her head. Her husband had become a stranger to her and she was ashamed, ashamed of her disorder and of those nervous ripples which had run over her naked skin. The silence and immobility of Guillaume were shattering to her, till she was utterly aghast, seeing him so lost in thought. She would have preferred an open quarrel, which might at last have brought them, tearful and merciful, into each other's arms again. If they said nothing, if they accepted the anguish of their situation without a word, from now on it was all over between them. Thus she sat on, drawing her night-gown about her knees, shivering, heaving profound sighs, without Guillaume seeming to notice that she too, at his side, was suffering.

At this instant the sound of psalm-singing suddenly penetrated from above them. Muffled by the floor boards and ceiling between, it drooled through the tranquil night like a death plaint. It was Geneviève, of course, unable to sleep, labouring for her own salvation and that of her master and mistress. But tonight the old woman's voice trailed off into strangely sinister lamentations. Terror-stricken, Madeleine harkened to it, and as she did so, pictured a funeral procession creeping down the corridors of *Noiraude* as priests came, psalm-singing, to take her away and bury her alive. Then the strident voice of the old Protestant woman came clear and still more nightmarish thoughts filled Madeleine's head. With Guillaume still speechless, lips tight-knit, eyes staring, she told herself that Geneviève's psalms might remind him of the prayer of exorcism she had once taught him. He would bend over her, making his cabalistic sign over her left breast, then another over her right breast, and a third over her navel, thrice repeating: "*Lubrica, daughter of Hell, go back to the flames whence thou camest for the damnation of men. May thy skin blacken and thy flaming hair cover thy whole body with the hair of the beast. In the name of Him thought of whom consumes thee, in the name of God the Father, avaunt*!" And, who could tell, perhaps she would then fall to dust. In her terror in this restless night hour, still a-quiver from her evil dreams, she accepted the fanatical old woman's wild vapourings as real and thus asked herself if a mere prayer would not be sufficient to kill her. Childish fears took possession of her. Softly she lay down again and covered herself with the bedclothes, her teeth chattering with fear that at any moment she might feel Guillaume's finger-nails inscribing those signs in her flesh. The only reason he stayed so silent and staring could be that he was waiting

for her to fall asleep, thus to make sure whether she was woman or devil, and this stupid fear utterly crushed her and kept her sleepless till morning light.

The following evening, husband and wife slept by tacit agreement in separate beds. From that moment they were as if divorced. The previous night's scene had shattered their marriage for ever. From the moment that Jacques had reappeared in their lives, everything had gradually driven them to this break. In their stubbornness they had tried to hold each other in fast embrace, to dispel the memory of that other man. They had refused to admit they were defeated, till they found they could struggle no more. Guillaume no longer felt strong enough to sleep beside a Madeleine shaken by such nightmares, and Madeleine could think of no way of remaining eternally awake.

Their divorce brought them a measure of relief. The strangest thing of all was that they were still very fond indeed of each other, were sorry for each other, even desired each other. The gulf which fatal forces had dug between them separated them only physically, and they stood on either edge of that gulf, loving each other from a distance. Their mutual anger and their mutual loathing were thus replete with impotent affection. They were very conscious that they were parted for ever, yet though they had lost all hope of coming together again and resuming their peaceable life of tender love, they still found a kind of bitter pleasure in living together under the same roof, and that pleasure prevented any attempt to seek complete cure in a violent, immediate end to it all.

Persistently, they avoided making up their minds what they should do when at last Jacques came back to them. At first they had postponed the worry of making a decision till the morrow. After that, they every day put off till "tomorrow" the talk they should have had about the matter. The difficulty of finding a reasonable way out and the pain which any such talk was bound to cause them, frightened them and impelled them to incessant postponement. As the weeks flowed by, they felt more timorous than ever, more incapable of being either frank or strong. Towards the end of the first month, they lived through agonizing days, constantly thinking they heard Jacques at the gates, ringing the bell. They even lacked the courage to admit their fears to each other, and found a measure of solace in talking of what left them both equally aghast. Whenever the door bell rang, they merely blenched, exchanging frightened glances.

At last, early in February, Guillaume received a letter from the

retired surgeon. First Jacques told him all about the death of his poor friend in Toulon hospital, then, cheerfully, he explained that in the port he had met a certain young person and trapesed after her all the way to Nice. The result was, he had not been able to get back to Paris as soon as he had hoped, but was staying on in the Midi, perhaps another fortnight, or it might even be another month.

Without a word, Guillaume handed the letter to Madeleine, and tried to trace her reactions on her face. She remained cold, only her lips tightened, almost imperceptibly. Thus freed from immediate danger, husband and wife both told themselves that they still had time, so once again postponed the anguish of making a decision.

By this time, however, this life at *Noiraude* had become unbearable to them. Everything here seemed to harrass them. One sunny morning, when they had gone out into the park, what should they see, glued to the railings along the Mantes road, but the frightful face of Louise, watching them with her wild eyes. No doubt it was sheer chance which had brought ruined "Verdigris" out to the environs of Véteuil. She seemed at once to recognize Madeleine. A smile bared her yellowing teeth, and she suddenly began singing the first verse of a song to which she and Madeleine together had listened, as it echoed through Verrière woods, in the tremulous air of twilight, when once they made their way back after a pleasure outing. The raucous voice croaked:

A Turkish pasha of sordid fame
Lord Mustapha was his name
For his harem did he get
Miss Katinka in his net
With a tra-la-la, and a tra-la-lee
Tra-la-la-la-la, tra-la-la-lee.

On Louise's lips, the *tra-la-la* of the chorus assumed a biting irony, and the decayed light-o'-love kept on repeating the mocking monosyllables with increasing fluency, till every time she broke off in a fit of mad, hysterical laughter. Madeleine and Guillaume made haste to withdraw indoors, as if that shabby little ditty had driven them in. But from that day on, Madeleine could not put her face out of doors without seeing Louise hanging on to the railings somewhere. The poor creature now haunted *Noiraude* with animal persistence. There was no question about it, she had spotted her old-time friend and could not stop trying to get a glimpse of her,

though without any thought of ill. For hours she would prowl to and fro, clambering up on the low stone wall in which the railings were mounted, just like a child. She would swing herself along a little way, clinging to the railings, then stop, leaning in, arms high above her head, to peer in stupid curiosity into the park. She was often to be heard beyond one of the walls, singing that ditty about Katinka. She would repeat it a dozen times or more, with all that stubbornness of disordered memory which finds pleasure in repetition of the few phrases it can still command.

Every time that Madeleine caught sight of Louise from the ground-floor windows, she felt a shudder of loathing run through her. It was as if she saw her own past life haunting her. That tattered old female racing to and fro beyond the rails or pressing her face between them was like a monstrous, loathsome animal trying to break the bars of its cage to get at her and dirty her with its dribbling. She nearly asked Guillaume to have the madwoman chased away into some other district, but she was afraid of possible scandal and would rather never go out again or never even show her face at the windows, than risk this.

Finding themselves thus absolute prisoners of the old mansion, Guillaume and Madeleine now began again to think of escaping to Paris. There, they would be protected from Louise's ditty and Geneviève's psalm-singing alike and also from the solemn glances of their own child. The two agonizing months which they had now passed here had made their solitude unbearable. Seeing that Jacques had now left them three or four weeks more of peace, they decided they would make use of the time to find some distraction, seeking out a better turn of fortune, and as soon as Lucie was better, towards the middle of March, they set out.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE little house in Boulogne Street had not been lived in for nearly five years. Guillaume had always been against letting it, for they had counted on spending the winter months there some day. In the early days of their marriage he had contented himself with sending an old footman from *Noiraude* to look after it. The man lived in a sort of sentry-box built of red-brick just inside the little yard in front of the house. His sole duty was to open the windows for one morning every week, to air the rooms. The job was a sort of pension for a faithful old retainer.

Suddenly given less than twenty-four hours notice of the pending advent of his master and mistress, he had spent most of the night dusting the furniture, and when Guillaume and Madeleine arrived they found a fire lit in every room. These glowing hearths in all the rooms delighted them, for they gave their first home the snugness of those long past days. On the journey up to Paris they had both felt heart-pangs at the thought that they were going back to this little house which enclosed those early months of their love, before they married. They recalled with particular distinctness the last weeks there and the undercurrent of unrest they had felt and they were fearful lest by coming back they were going to stir up all those bitter memories, much as they had already done at their *Noiraude* cottage. Hence they were astonished and delighted too by the cheerfulness of the little house, which as they drew near to Paris they had been picturing as far more dismal and distressing. Guillaume had only one bad moment. Entering the bedroom, he found Jacques' portrait hanging on the wall. The old footman must have discovered it where he had hidden it. But quickly, before Madeleine came in, Guillaume took it down and tossed it into the back of a cupboard.

However, they had no intention of isolating themselves now in their Paris home. Now these tight little rooms, this discreet nook which had once been all they wanted, and meant to provide them with a snug cradle for their nascent love, seemed too small to hold them. The little house would have meant living in constant intimacy with each other, almost in one another's arms. Today, their souls found the mere sight of the little settees on which they had once been

happy to squeeze together, quite repugnant. They had come to Paris with the firm intention of never spending any time at home but constantly going out and about to seek distraction. They wanted to lose themselves in crowds of people and feel as much apart from each other as possible. The very next morning, after their arrival, they went round to call on the de Rieus, whose town house was quite near, in La Bruyère Street. The de Rieus were out, but the same evening they came round to see them.

The triangular situation of this *ménage* was unchanged. Hélène de Rieu was still in the arms of Tiburce Rouillard, with her husband dancing attendance. De Rieu himself, indeed, seemed a sick man. For a long time now, he had been a martyr to a liver complaint. But though he was yellowed and racked by constant pain, his features had lost nothing of their scornful disdain, his eyelids still flickered as slyly as before. Tiburce was now quite the polished town gentleman. He had acquired that permanent expression of petulant boredom proper to a man who fulfils a burdensome task which is forced on him. His features, including the tight lips, made no pretence at concealing a sort of spitefulness, an underlying need to be brutal. As for Hélène de Rieu, she was so changed that neither Guillaume nor Madeleine could prevent a start of astonishment. She was surely letting herself go very badly, neglecting hair-dyes and make-up. This was no longer the ageing baby doll, with cheeks gleaming from creams, and infantile smirk on her face. It was instead a poor creature whose grey hair and deeply-lined face expressed a misery which was both unclean and rather shocking. Previous over-use of pomades and skin-foods had wrought havoc with her outer integument, which now hung loose and puffy. Her heavy eyelids half covered her eyes. Her lips were flaccid, as if something had pressed them out of shape. One would have said that the mask which usually concealed her face had just dropped off, to reveal the real face beneath the borrowed one. And the worst of all was that that under-face did still retain something of the sickening graces of the mask. The wrinkles, badly cleansed, were grained with vestiges of rouge, while, with the dye half faded out, her hair offered a range of most unseemly discoloration.

Hélène de Rieu could not have been more than forty-five, but she looked a good sixty. In addition, she seemed to have forgotten how to perform those vapouring tricks and dainty little-girl gestures. Shrinking, coarsened, she looked about her with the cringing air of a woman accustomed to being beaten.

As he entered the sitting-room, Tiburce rushed forward to greet Guillaume with that false effusion of friendship that he always put on. Finding Hélène, whose arm he had abandoned to do this, much too slow getting out of his way, he shot her an angry look, trampled on her gown, and roughly shouldered her aside, just as she was presenting her compliments to Madeleine, with one of her old child-like curtseys. But at once, with an air of terror she now flattened herself against the wall and, forgetting to complete her greetings, resumed the air of stupefaction with which she had entered. Nothing of this little scene escaped de Rieu, neither the way Tiburce jostled his wife out of the way, nor her terrified submission, but the old man kept his eyes half-closed, as if he had seen nothing, and the cordial smile on his lips remained unchanged.

The company seated themselves. After a few minutes of trivial talk about how dismal the country was in the winter and the entertainment offered by Paris at this time of the year, Guillaume asked Tiburce if he would care to smoke a cigar with him in the next room. The fact was, Hélène's appearance had sickened him.

Once the two ladies were alone with M. de Rieu, they found they had nothing whatever to say to each other. Seated in a large arm-chair, his hands folded in his lap, the old gentleman proceeded to gaze straight before him, in his eyes that vague look of the deaf, whose thoughts no sound interrupts. He even seemed oblivious of where he was. Every now and then his eyelids sank slowly down, and then, with a pointed squint of exquisite sarcasm, he peered at the two women, examining them closely without their realizing it.

There was a period of silence, then, inevitably, Hélène began to talk about Tiburce. She was indeed now quite incapable of talking about anything else. He completely dominated her life. Everything led back to him. Any other subject was quickly exhausted. After a few phrases she invariably found her way back to the life of mingled vice and fear that her lover forced on her. In the love life to which she abandoned her body she was gradually losing all human dignity, even that ultimate reserve of feminine modesty, that complex of prudence and pride which at least usually prevents a woman openly confessing the shameful things she does. Hélène de Rieu, on the contrary, revelled in exposing her intimacies. She would confide details to the first person she met. She seemed no longer aware how low she had sunk. So long as her thoughts were on the man who had become her all, she was satisfied. Indeed, she only needed to be given her head, to pour out her story without

interruption, plunging with most embarrassing exhilaration into the story of her debauches, till this logically led her to confessions which were really outrageous. She seemed to revel in the filth of her own words, and forget that she was talking to another human being. The truth indeed was that she talked to suit herself alone, talked merely in order to re-live the disgraceful things she told about.

Thus now she told Madeleine everything. It had been a most commonplace observation that had served as the link between trivial talk and full confession of her adultery. She achieved it so naturally that Madeleine was able to hear it without a frown. Referring now to Tiburce as her lover and remarking that of course Madeleine must have known him for years, she added lachrymously: "Oh, dear Countess, I have taken cruel punishment. That man, who was formerly so gentle and so attentive, has become cruel and merciless. . . . He actually beats me. I am well aware this is a shocking thing to confess, but I am so unhappy, I have such need for consolation. . . . How fortunate you are never to have left the straight and narrow path, so you can live in peace. . . . I expect you saw, he jostled me aside just now. I quite expect him to kill me one of these days."

She found great pleasure in her sufferings, and her voice took on the most sensuous timbre when she spoke of the blows she received. One could easily divine that she would not on any account have changed her martyr life for the life of chaste tranquillity the delights of which she pretended to crave. That was all mere talk. Those false regrets were merely her excuse for telling the whole story. In that, she found a bizarre stimulus, a titillation of her nerves which enabled her to extract still more from the bitter pleasures of her life. Little she cared if this meant exhibiting open sores, so long as she might talk about her favourite topic. She even pleased to depict her condition in colours more lurid than the real ones and make herself out a victim, as then people got sentimental about her. She would go on endlessly like that, groaning and moaning, so long as anybody would listen, lamenting her girlhood innocence, now too far off to respond to her cry, to plunge back into her filth with all the satisfaction of the cur that licks the hand that strikes it.

Although all this was told in an undertone, Madeleine was constantly afraid de Rieu might hear. She kept glancing anxiously across at the old man. At last, Hélène noticed this.

"Oh, don't you worry," she babbled with untroubled cynicism,

even raising her voice a little: "My husband cannot hear me. . . . Besides, I am more to be pitied than he is. He knows nothing of it all. He never sees my tears, I take good care to hide them from him. I always smile when he is about, even when in his presence Tiburce treats me as the lowest of women. Yesterday, I tell you, that man actually slapped me in my own drawing-room, all because I reproved him for running after professional whores. You could have heard the slap in the next room. And didn't it sting, too! But my husband was stooping down by the fireside at that moment, and he did not turn round till a moment later, and he was quite unmoved, he had heard nothing at all. I put on a smile, though my cheek burned terribly. . . . No, we can talk, dear. . . . Just look at him: he's half asleep."

De Rieu did indeed look as if he were dozing, but none the less his piercing glance was following all this through half-closed lashes, and from the slight quiver which passed through his clasped hands more perspicacious eyes would have judged that he was thoroughly enjoying some great secret pleasure. Indeed, he was, for he had lip-read the whole story of that back-hander his wife had received from her lover.

Madeleine thought it her duty to condole. That was after all mere politeness to a caller. She expressed her astonishment that M. Rouillard's affections should so soon have faded out.

"I really cannot make out why he has become so cruel to me," was Hélène's reply. "I am sure he still loves me. But he does have these black moods. . . . However, in spite of it all, I am devoted to him, you know. I have already been to see several influential men here in Paris, so Tiburce should have a post suited to his merits, though I must confess I have most unaccountably had terribly bad luck so far." She sighed. "I am not a young woman. I wonder if Tiburce's love for me has a grain of self-interest in it. What do you think?"

Of course Madeleine assured Madame de Rieu that this was far from her thoughts.

"Well, it worries me quite a lot," de Rieu's wife ran on, hypocritically enough, for she knew quite well what was the matter.

Tiburce himself had not minced words with her. She even had no illusions left as to his intention of using her as a stepping-stone. After all, all he cared about was whether she paid up for the services he rendered her. However, she had still not brought herself to the point of admitting in so many words that she was prepared to

purchase the young man's love rather than be deprived of those physical delights he gave her. She clung to the young fellow with the fury of any woman at the change of life, with all that adolescent ardour which comes back to the fair sex at such time. Tiburce had become indispensable to her. It was certain that if he left her she would not be able to find another such lover to suit her, so no matter what shameful price he demanded, she would pay up.

"I would so like to be of some service to him," she ran on, pursuing the same thread of thought, despite herself. "He might be a little more grateful to me then. I still have hopes. . . . I expect you find a great change in me, don't you? I can no longer bring myself to be as *chic* as I used to be, I am so unhappy."

A limp bundle, she huddled in her chair. She had utterly gone to pieces. The truth was that her sexual indulgence had so exhausted her that she had sunk into a sort of perpetual somnolence. She cared about nothing, not even her own toilet. This woman who previously had struggled so tenaciously against the advancing years could now scarcely be bothered even to wash her hands. For days on end she lounged about, in a stupor, brooding animal-like over yesterday's transports and dreaming of those she might taste tomorrow. Reduced to brutish lubricity, the woman in her who once had wanted, indeed needed, to look attractive and appear eternally young and sought after, was in a moribund state, and provided that Tiburce continued to satisfy her frenzied old woman lusts, she cared nought for flattering words or even affection. She had one sole fixed idea, and that was to keep that instrument of pleasure for ever in her arms. Any thought of making him her slave by her vapourings or by the charms of her painted face was now abandoned. She counted solely on her dirty tricks in bed and the shocking abandon to which she was prepared to go, to bind him to her.

Madeleine eyed her with disgusted pity. She did not really fathom the truth of this decayed piece of humanity. She imagined that Tiburce's cruelty to Hélène alone was enough to have caused this collapse of body and soul. However, she could not restrain a cry of outrage.

"But you should at once dismiss such a creature!" she cried.

Hélène looked up at her in terror.

"Dismiss him?" she stammered, with stupid fear. "Dismiss him?" Madeleine might have been suggesting cutting off a limb. Then, pulling herself together a bit, Hélène de Rieu added quickly: "My dear, he would never consent to it. Oh, you really don't know him.

If I were merely to mention parting, he would be capable of murdering me. . . . No, no, I belong to him and I shall have to bear my cross to the very end."

This was an impudent lie. That very afternoon, her lover had threatened never to set foot in her bedroom again if she did not find him a suitable post.

"Oh, how I envy you," Hélène repeated. "How good it must be to be virtuous."

She began to whine again, a rambling monologue illumined with a strange smirk on her flabby cheeks as she remembered her love transports with Tiburce. The disgusting drivel went on for nearly an hour, full of ludicrous regrets, alternating with bursts of hope of more debauch. Confessions made with utter cynicism mingled with appeals to decent folk to help her and take pity on her. In the end, Madeleine began to feel really upset by all these lamentations. At the same time, the woman's over-frank confessions embarrassed her. But she said nothing, confining herself at last to silent nods, every now and then looking across uneasily at de Rieu. But on the old gentleman's lips there was still that faint suggestion of a smile, his whole air was one of sarcastic trust. Finally, when Hélène began to tell the same dirty story for the tenth time, Madeleine suddenly remembered her own troubles. Her thoughts turned to the conflict which was breaking Guillaume and herself, till she nearly came to wishing she could see her own husband deaf and imbecile, tied to an armchair, and herself so decayed as to have ceased to rebel, revelling at last in a soporific state of shame.

While the two women were thus talking, Guillaume and Rouillard had retired to the little sitting-room next door, which served as smoking-room. Thirsty for the trivialities of small-talk, Guillaume asked his old schoolfellow if he was satisfied with things in Paris. He cared little what the answer was, for he loathed the man, but at the same time he was glad to have him there, so as to forget himself for a few moments. With sullen exasperation, Rouillard replied that so far nothing had come off. Guillaume's innocent question had touched him on a very raw spot.

Rouillard puffed feverishly at his cigar for a few moments, then let go all the fury which was cooking up in him. He confessed to Guillaume just as his mistress did to Madeleine, speaking of Madame de Rieu in the terms men use among themselves when they talk of trollops. This creature, he declared, with staggering effrontery, had abused his youth, but he was not going to let his life be ruined by so

ludicrous a love affair. He was determined to get out of the grasp of this monstrous Megaera. Her kisses revolted him. What he did not confess was his wrath at not having had his ambitions satisfied. The real source of his disgust was the small return he had so far obtained for those kisses, but those favours afforded him the opportunity of playing the part of a stripling to be pitied, who through lack of experience had got trapped between an old woman's bed-sheets. Had Hélène de Rieu succeeded in getting him appointed a Commissioner of Audit to the State Council or Attaché at an Embassy, he would have had nothing but the most sickening praises for the lady and would have done his utmost to make the liaison seem right and proper. But, do understand, for all the caresses he had lavished on the old bitch he had not received a penny, and Tiburce Rouillard was not the lad to give anything for nothing.

Nor was it as if he did not know that the poor woman had not spared herself. She had run round all over the place, pulling every string she could. But her passionate desire to be useful to him moved him little. What he wanted was results, and fate willed that his mistress should be unable to do a thing. Fate in this case was otherwise known as de Rieu. That veteran knew that the play would be robbed of his wife, were Mr. Rouillard ever to get the price of his kisses, so at every fresh effort of his wife's, he slyly went the rounds behind her back, to undo whatever she had tied up, thereby reducing her most skilful scheming to nullity. It was an excellent means of exacerbating the lovers one against the other and promoting terrible quarrels, which he, as connoisseur, enjoyed. Having thus engineered another failure, he would for days on end delight himself with his wife's cringing mortification and Tiburce's venting of his spite on her. Round to the house would come the lover, his lips tight, his cheeks bloodless, his fists clenched, and by hook or by crook endeavour to get his mistress tight in a corner, where he could nag and bully. On such occasions she would most tenaciously insist on sticking to her husband's side. Tremulous, eyes red, she fastened beseeching eyes on her lover, while the deaf man seemed to become even more hard of hearing than usual, on his countenance an expression of idiotic contentment. Finally, when at last Tiburce did succeed in getting Hélène by herself and lost his temper to the point of giving her a good shaking, though the old boy always by sheer fortune contrived to have his back to them, he always seemed to hear it all, words and blows alike. Unseen, his features then assumed an expression of devilish cruelty.

The result of the husband's machinations was that Rouillard was now coming to the conclusion that his mistress had no pull whatsoever and could be of absolutely no help to him. This made him pitiless, leaving him with one obsession—to avenge himself for four years' useless service, thereby to put her in her place and cause her some final degradation. Till now he had never dared leave her altogether, since he had put so much painful effort into it, being unable ever to bring himself to cut his losses. Consequently, he had always returned to the charge, invoking Heaven and telling himself that Providence could never let him down so badly as to give him no reward for his constancy. Today, however, he had lost all hope and was quite determined to break it all off.

Guillaume heard young Rouillard's outraged story with an air of sympathy. He was really rather revolted by the young man's liaison, but he allowed Rouillard to get the impression that he was shocked, indeed sorry, about the barren result. Rouillard told his story to find relief, but also to test de Viargue, whom he knew to be a sensitive and rather prim person, and find out how he might explain away his outrageous liaison with Hélène de Rieu to other people. He felt that if she really did fail in the end to get him some prominent position, he would be scorned and mocked at for having ever shared her bed. Whereas success would at once change him to a man of ability, worthy of every favour, failure would sink him for ever. It was therefore his intention to meet scorn and mockery half-way by posing as a victim with the right to be pardoned. He manoeuvred with incredible skill. Guillaume even went so far as himself to offer his own services. If Rouillard liked, he would be prepared to give him a letter to an old friend of his father's. At the same time, he strongly approved of the young man's intention of ending that liaison. Here, of course, his own action was not entirely disinterested. By bringing himself to take up Rouillard's cause, about which he really did not care at all—by thus bothering about somebody else, in short—he thought he might come to forget himself.

Their cigars finished, the two men now rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room. Caught in full-spate of self-pity, Hélène de Rieu shot a terrified glance at her lover, as if afraid he might give her a drubbing for having dared to complain. In her anxiety, she scarcely dared open her mouth, and whenever she did he invariably picked it up spitefully, interrupting her and making it clear to her that she did not know what she was talking about. He did not even

make any attempt to conceal from the rest of the company his impatience with her. One might have thought he was setting himself out to show Guillaume how little she meant to him.

The evening came to an end in a chilly atmosphere. When the visitors took their leave, M. de Rieu, who had hardly spoken a word all the time, in his dry voice suddenly pronounced a real eulogy of Tiburce, saying what a very fine fellow he was, his friendship meant so much to them both, M. Rouillard was not like those scatter-brained young folk whose only thought was of pleasure, he knew how to respect and even feel affection for those who were getting on in years. After that, he sent Tiburce out to find them a cab! It was indeed his regular custom to use the young man like a servant. When he went out anywhere he never bothered to tell his coachman to come to fetch him, but sent Rouillard. On this occasion, it was pouring with rain, and Rouillard returned spattered with mud to the knees. De Rieu at once made use of him for support to the cab, then sent him back to fetch Madame de Rieu, who was waiting in the porch. It only lacked for him to tell Tiburce he might ride up on the box, beside the driver.

It was patent to Guillaume and Madeleine that such visits were not going to suffice to take their minds off their troubles. Nor could there be any thought of giving parties in so small a house as theirs, the most they could do there was to have the de Rieus to intimate evenings of small talk. They therefore decided that every evening they must go out, to call on other people and drown their miseries in the noisy triviality of those drawing-rooms where dozens of people who are really strangers one to another, meet and smirk from nine in the evening to midnight. The following day, de Rieu let them have the key of his introduction to seven or eight houses which were delighted to offer the name of de Viargue hospitality. In no time they had their days occupied from one Monday to the other. When evening came, out they would go, to dine in some restaurant like wayfarers, returning home only when it was bedtime.

At first, they did feel an assuagement. The vapidity of the life soothed them. It was of little matter where they went. Every drawing-room was the same to them. Madeleine would establish herself gingerly on a settee, on her lips that indeterminate smile of a woman without a single idea in her head. If there was music, although she did not listen, she would gaze ecstatically at the piano. If there was dancing, she would accept the first offer of a partner, then resume her place, unable to say whether the man she had

danced with was fair or dark. So long as there was a lot of light and noise all round her, she was happy. Guillaume, for his part, effaced himself among all the other black-coated menfolk. He would spend whole evenings in window-seats, with chill solemnity following with his glance the chain of naked shoulders which passed, shivering and gleaming, under the bold light of many candles, or else he would establish himself behind a card player and give every appearance of being passionately interested in the course of a game about which he knew absolutely nothing. He had always hated society, and mingled in it now out of despair, to be able for a few hours to lose Madeleine. When the drawing-rooms began to empty, husband and wife would also withdraw, with due ceremony, feeling as they made their way down the stairs that they were now a trifle more strangers to each other than when they came in.

Whereas their evenings were engaged, their days gaped empty. Madeleine, however, flung herself feverishly into a whirl of Parisian life, spending her time shopping, at the dressmaker or at the milliner. She became very smart and tried to work up an interest in the latest concoctions of *la mode*. As friend she took with her a scatter-brain who had just married straight from her convent and was busy ruining her husband with all the greed of a dressy little tart. This person also persuaded Madeleine to go round the churches with her, to listen to the sermons of fashionable ecclesiastics, after which they walked in the *Bois de Boulogne*, busily a-chatter about the get-up of the courtesans parading there.

This whirlwind existence, full of nervous titillation and frivolity, did at least furnish Madeleine with a sort of intoxication that stamped her features with an inane smirk, just like an alcoholic. Guillaume at the same time led the life of a bored bachelor with well-lined purse. He lunched out, he rode horseback in the afternoon, and he tried to take an interest in the thousand and one trifles which provide subjects of conversation in the men's clubs. But at least he did manage to see nothing at all of his wife till the time came round to take her out for the evening.

The young couple spent a whole month in this fashion, striving to master the arts of those fashionable society marriages which men make with the idea at once of improving their bank account and keeping the family name going. By such marriages, the young husband established his social standing, while the young wife acquired her freedom. They spent the night in the same bedroom, but after that they lived apart, more often exchanging bows than

conversation, the man resuming his bachelor life, the woman beginning her life of adultery. Frequently, all intimate relations between them ceased. A few, however—the more highly sexed—did have connecting bedrooms, and every now and then the husband paid a visit to his wife's much as he might to a brothel.

Guillaume and Madeleine, however, were too broken by their tormented love to put up with such a way of life for long. They had not grown up in worldly egotism and were incapable of learning the chill courtesy or the detachment of heart and senses which makes it possible for husband and wife to live side by side like strangers. The way they had met and their five years of secluded, tender love, even the pain they had caused each other, all combined to prevent their forgetting each other and establishing separate lives. In vain for them to strive to make a complete division between themselves, their pleasures or their sorrows, they always found themselves feeling and thinking the same. Their lives were utterly entangled, everywhere, fatally so.

Thus, after the third week, their anguish took possession of them again. They had allowed the fevers of a way of life which was new to them to take possession of them, but their change of habit had only been capable of distracting them from their obsession for a brief space. At first these drawing-rooms in which they lost sight one of another had provided them with a sort of contented stupor. The glitter of the many candles blinded them and the tumult of so many voices blotted out that of their inner thoughts. But when their first astonishment had worn thin and they had grown accustomed to the lights and to the grinning, garish crowd, they withdrew again into themselves, the world of society faded and they found themselves back in their isolation. Then, every evening, they carried their sufferings with them. They still did the round of the drawing-rooms, spending long hours with thirty or forty people round them, but in a somnolent state, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, absorbed in the anguish of their own flesh and their own souls. And if, to find relief from discomfort, they did try to take an interest in all that surrounded them, they saw through clouded eyes. The very atmosphere seemed turgid with greyish smoke, every object in it tarnished, faded, dirty, and the rhythmic movements of the dancers and the harmonies of the piano seemed merely to repeat the nervous spasms which had broken them. The painted faces seemed red with tears, the bare shoulders of the women seemed a cynical display, the solemnity of the men frightened them. This

environment in which they lived was not powerful enough to stupefy them by its smiling wealth, but they themselves, on the contrary, lent the scene their own degradation and despair.

What was more, once they ceased to be surprised by their surroundings, they were suddenly able to assess the true value of these people whose sugared words had at first bemused them. The vapidity and empty-headedness of Parisian society then sickened them. They lost any hope of finding a cure in the company of such puppets. They felt they had come to a sort of play. In the first scenes they had let the glitter and wealth of costume, the exquisite politeness and the pure language of the characters captivate them. But in the following scenes the illusion faded and they realized that everything had been sacrificed to outward appearance, the characters' heads were empty, the words they spoke learned by rote.

It was this disillusionment that forced them back on their own thoughts. They resumed their sufferings with a sort of pride. They preferred their passion-rent existence, their anguish, to this emptiness they had discovered behind these other heads and hearts. They soon knew all about the little scandals of the corner of Paris which they frequented. They knew that such and such a lady was the mistress of so and so and that the husband knew all about it and tolerated it.

They learned that another husband was living with mistress and wife in the same house, with full permission for the wife to get her love where she willed. These stories astounded them. However could people live calmly amid such disgraceful things? Here were they, out of their minds over a mere memory, dying of anguish because they had not grown up from childhood in each other's arms. They must be made of much more sensitive stuff, their hearts prouder, of nobler metal than these married folk whom nothing troubled, not even utter disgrace, so long as they were themselves left selfishly alone. From then on they found redress for their sufferings by cultivating a masterly scorn of a society which was far more guilty than they were, yet smiled from out of its filth.

One day, in a moment of anger, the same thought came to them both. They told themselves that in order the better to forget, they ought each to try to find love outside the marriage bed. But at the very first step their inner self rebelled. Madeleine was at this time in the full bloom of her beauty, and in all the drawing-rooms they frequented had always a crowd around her, while young men with foppish gloves and dazzling shirt-fronts paid her assiduous court.

But to her they were all ridiculous dolls. For his part, Guillaume got so far as to accept an invitation to a dinner at which some of his new friends had conspired to furnish him with enough girls to select a mistress for himself, but the sight of so many young light-o'-loves, devoid even of table manners, treating their lovers like footmen, merely disgusted him.

No, Guillaume and Madeleine were bound together too closely by their bonds of sorrow ever to be able to break them, and though the revolt of their hypersensitive nerves no longer allowed them to show each other any affection, their love-sickness still refused ever to allow them complete oblivion. Thus they lived on close one to another, ever belonging, never daring to make contact, and any attempt they made to bring about a violent break merely served to subject them to more unbearable suffering.

After a month, they gave up further struggle. Since their separate lives, daytime distractions without each other, and hours spent together in crowded drawing-rooms in the evenings, no longer afforded any relief, they gradually gave it all up, and stayed at home, shut away again in their little Paris home. Here, their utter defeat crushed them. Guillaume was now very conscious to what extent Madeleine possessed him. From the very outset of their love, she had been the fatally dominant partner, her character the stronger, her blood the richer. As with a smile he used to say at that time, he was the woman in their home, the weaker vessel, who obeyed. He was also the one who suffered the other's influence, both physical and spiritual. The same process which had filled Madeleine with Jacques tended to fill Guillaume with Madeleine. He was shaped after her fashion, assuming her voice and her gestures. There were moments when with horror he told himself that in his flesh and blood he now bore both his wife and her lover. Deep within him, he seemed to feel them stirring and embracing in their love. He was a slave, the thing of this woman who was the thing of another man. It was a double tangle of possession, the torments of which submerged them both in an anguish without hope.

Guillaume was forced into passivity. He followed every phase of Madeleine's folly, felt the recoil of every shock that she suffered. Growing calmer whenever she became calm, he writhed with agony and horror the moment she was again torn by inner struggle. Just as she had once created peace for him, so now she created his new instability. Tossed back to her, lost in her, devoid of courage, save for what she had, with only her will, everything her body felt and

every impulse which she experienced bore him too along with it. Sometimes she would give him a peculiar look.

"Ah," she told herself, "if only he were a stronger character, we still might find a cure. I would rather he dominated me, rather he grew angry with me till he beat me with his fists. I feel it would do me good to be beaten. Were I limp on the floor, and he had shown his strength, I think I might suffer less. He ought to destroy Jacques in me by blows with his fists. Were he strong, he could do so."

Guillaume read these thoughts in Madeleine's eyes. Like her, he understood that he could probably have saved her from her memories, had he had the vitality to treat her as if he were the master, crushing her in his embrace till she utterly forgot Jacques. Instead of shuddering when she shuddered, he should have kept his head and, living superior to these mental conflicts of hers, imposed on her the serenity of his own spirit. When these thoughts came to him, he charged himself with all the misfortune, but yet he only weakened all the more, treating himself as cowardly by nature, constitutionally unable to overcome his own weakness. Then for hours on end he and Madeleine maintained a miserable silence. Her lips curled faintly with mingled pain and scorn, while he found refuge in that highly-strung pride of his, that inward conviction in the mobility and warmth of his own heart, which was his last resort.

A few days after their decision to stop their pointless society life, they began to feel so utterly miserable in the little house in Boulogne Street that their thoughts came round to returning to *Noiraude*. Not that they had the slightest hope of finding any relief there. Any such hope would have seemed ridiculous to them. Ever since that night when they ran away from Jacques they had seemed to be driven by a wind of mad terror which had never let them pause to take breath. Their unwillingness to make a plan and their continual avoidance of any decision had plunged them into a devastating state of somnolence in which all will-power was paralysed, and gradually they had become accustomed to their state of apprehensive expectation, till they no longer had the strength to get out of it.

Thus, half-stupefied, apparently indifferent to what happened, they let the dismal, empty days creep by. They told themselves that sooner or later Jacques was bound to turn up. They were even beginning to find his silence alarming, telling themselves that he

must be back in Paris. But so lost were they in their stupor that they made no more efforts to escape him.

This would have gone on for years, without their ever thinking of getting free from their sufferings by some forceful move. In that broken state it only needed a new shock to complete their ruin. While they awaited this, they lived in a vague state of misery, drifting now with blind instinct till it led them back to *Noiraude*. They came home less to avoid Jacques in Paris than for a change of scene. But their uneasiness of mind and soul now made the cloistered life which had once so happily lulled them quite unbearable. They were tempted again by the idea of travelling, of constant rapid change. It was however now already mid-April, the afternoons were beginning to be quite warm, it was the proper time if ever to stay in the country. And so, not being made for a worldly life of any sort, they chose to go back to suffer in the silence and peace of the countryside.

The evening before they left, they paid the de Rieus a farewell visit. They had not seen anything of them for some time. At the house, they were told that the old man was at death's door, and they were just going to withdraw when a servant came running to tell them that M. de Rieu would like them to go up to see him. They found the old gentleman in bed, in a large, gloomy room. The liver complaint from which he suffered had suddenly taken an acute form which left no doubt about an early end. De Rieu had in fact insisted on obtaining the whole truth from his doctor, in order, he said, to put certain affairs in order before departing this world.

When Guillaume and Madeleine entered the enormous room, what should they find but Tiburce Rouillard, standing with very worried expression at the foot of the dying man's bed, while at its head was Hélène de Rieu herself, seated in an armchair, also apparently suffering from the shock of some unexpected blow. Sharp as steel blades, the dying man's eyes were flickering from one to the other. Though frightfully sunken from suffering, de Rieu's jaundiced cheeks maintained their usual smile of supreme sarcasm, and there was about his lips a cruel little twist which had invariably curled their corners whenever he relished his wife's torments. Holding out his hand to the young couple, de Rieu welcomed them, and then, learning that they were about to leave for *Noiraude*, he said: "How glad I am to be able to bid you farewell! I shall not see *Noiraude* again myself."

There was however not a hint of regret in his voice. Silence

ensued, that lugubrious silence which always hovers about a death-bed. The prey of an anxiety they did not even try to conceal, Tiburce Rouillard and Hélène de Rieu neither spoke nor moved. After a few moments, de Rieu, who seemed to be greatly enjoying the appearance of his wife and her lover, turned again to his visitors. "I was just settling a few little domestic matters," he said. "You two are not in the way. So, if you do not mind, I will continue. . . . I was just acquainting our friend M. Rouillard with my will: I have left everything to him, on condition he becomes my poor Hélène's husband."

A snigger of some hidden enjoyment seemed to ring in de Rieu's voice, as he spoke, for he was dying as he had lived, sarcastic and implacable. With bitter self-indulgence, he was administering a last scornful clout to the world of unhappiness and shame that he had known. His last moments, in fact, had been entirely devoted to the devising and perfecting of the torture to which he meant to condemn Hélène and Tiburce after his death. By preventing Rouillard's obtaining any of the posts he sought, he had to such an extent exasperated the fellow that after a terrible scene in which he had given her a disgraceful beating, he had broken off all relations with Hélène. That final rupture had worried de Rieu very much indeed, for he saw his revenge slipping away from him. He had gone just a little too far. Now he would have to reconcile the lovers and bind them to each other so they could never break their bonds again. It was then that he had suddenly conceived the idea of making young Rouillard marry his widow after his death. Rouillard would never let slip the opportunity of acquiring such wealth, even though it cost him permanent revulsion, nor would Hélène be sensible enough to refuse her consent to the man whose trembling, cringing slave she had become. The dying man thus saw Tiburce Rouillard fettered to a woman twice his age, condemned like a prisoner in irons to drag her ugliness and her shamelessness at his heels for ever. He could picture Hélène, still more exhausted by excesses, begging for kisses with the humility of a servant and buffeted morning and night by a husband who behind closed doors would take his vengeance of her for the bitter smiles she would be able to force from him before others. The life of such a couple would be hell, torture, eternal punishment and as he pictured that existence of alternate perverse indulgence and blows, de Rieu was able to smirk, despite the frightful pains now rending apart his loins and his heart.

Turning to Tiburce, he said in tones of indescribable mockery: "My boy, I have grown accustomed to look upon you as a son, and all I want is your happiness. All I ask of you in return for my wealth is to show my dear wife your tender affection. Though she is your senior, you will find in her succour and support. In the terms I have imposed in my will you should see but my keen desire to leave two happy souls behind me on this earth. You may thank me later."

Turning to Hélène, he said:

"You will be a mother to him, will you not? You have always been so fond of youth. Make a man of this lad, see he does not get ruined by shameful ways in Paris. Guide him to great things."

All this, Hélène heard in real horror. The dying voice had in it such insulting undertones that at long last she asked herself whether after all her husband had not noticed something of her shocking goings-on. To her mind came his smiles and his disdainful calm, and she told herself that the deaf man must have heard it all and understood it all, and it was she, not he, who had been deceived. This peculiar last will and testament now explained to her that life of silent scorn. To throw her like this into Tiburce's arms, her husband must have known of the liaison and now intended to punish her for it. Thought of such a marriage terrified her. The young man had treated her with utter callousness, so manhandling her on the day of their final quarrel that fear of further blows completely stilled Hélène's sexual appetite, and she could not help shivering from head to foot at the thought of this marriage, which would for ever expose her to Rouillard's brutal treatment. But her flesh was degraded and undermined to such extent that she did not dare even for an instant dream of escaping her lover's will. He could do what he would with her. Thus, wretched and utterly passive, she listened to her dying husband's behest, her only response a nod of consent. To console herself she had but the one thought: "Even if Tiburce beats me, there will always be moments when I shall hold him in my arms."

On second thought, however, she realized that with the money of her first husband, her second would frequent prostitute after prostitute till the time came when he would doubtless refuse her even the after-remnants of his sex, and this thought crushed her absolutely.

Tiburce, meanwhile, was gradually recovering his equanimity. Abstracting Hélène's body, he totted up in his head how much he

was going to have altogether, what with the fortune de Rieu was leaving him and the income he had already inherited from his cattle-dealer father. The figure rang so sweet that it convinced him that, whatever the cost, he must marry this woman. There of course was the sting. What on earth was he then to do with his Megaera? He knew no answer, and his horror welled up anew, though without shaking his resolution. If there was no other way, he would lock himself in a cellar with her and do her slowly to death. But, even if thereafter he had to live in perpetual torment, he was going to have that money.

De Rieu read Rouillard's final decision in those blue eyes and the cold, malicious expression of his victim's lips, and he let his head fall back to the pillow. A last snigger flashed over the pain-contorted features.

"Good," he mumbled faintly, "now I can die quietly."

Guillaume and Madeleine had witnessed this passage with growing discomfort. They realized that they had just seen the final act of an atrocious drama. They hastened now to bid farewell to the dying man. Stupefied, slumped deep in her chair, Hélène did not even get up. It was Tiburce Rouillard who saw them out to the hall. And, as they went downstairs, Rouillard recalled the shocking terms in which he had spoken to Guillaume of Madame de Rieu and thought it now up to him to play the hypocrite.

"I used to misjudge this poor lady very badly," he observed. "Of course the approaching end of her husband upset her terribly. . . . He is indeed confiding a sacred legacy to me. I shall do all in my power to make her happy." Then, feeling himself sufficiently under control, and anxious to close the subject, he added, suddenly: "By the way, I came across one of our old school-fellows today."

The colour left Madeleine's cheeks.

"An old school-fellow?" demanded Guillaume, with apprehensive voice.

"Yes," Tiburce replied. "Jacques Berthier! You know, that big chap who used to take your part. Why, you two were inseparable. . . . I gather he's well off today. A week or so ago he came back to Paris from the Midi."

Neither Guillaume nor Madeleine spoke. The hall was dark where this conversation took place, and it was impossible for Rouillard to see their changed countenances.

"Upon my word," he continued. "He's quite a gay fellow too. I'll bet he gets through his uncle's fortune in a few years. He took

me round to his flat, he's got a delightful mezzanine place in Taitbout Street. And it smells devilish of womanflesh too."

He gave a little laugh, as if he himself were a steady character, incapable of such folly. Guillaume held out his hand, to take his leave. But Rouillard ran on:

"We talked of you, you know. He had no idea you were in Paris, let alone had your own place here. I gave him your address. He said he'd look round tomorrow evening."

Guillaume had opened the outer door.

"Well, good-bye," he said feverishly, shaking Rouillard's hand and starting walking down the street at the same time.

Alone for a moment with Rouillard, Madeleine quickly enquired Jacques' exact address in Taitbout Street. Rouillard told her. Catching her husband up, she offered him her arm, and without a word they walked the short distance to Boulogne Street. Here they found a letter from Geneviève. It was short and very pressing. Little Lucie had had a relapse. They were to return without delay.

Everything thus conspired to hurry them from Paris. Not for anything in the world would they have stayed there till the following evening. Madeleine could not sleep all night.

The next morning, they were just making their way into the station, when Madeleine suddenly made out that she had forgotten an important item of luggage. She seemed very upset about it. In vain Guillaume told her that their man would be sure to send it on. She stood hesitant, unable to make up her mind. Guillaume offered to run back for the missing package himself, but Madeleine would not hear of it. But just as the bell clanged for the train to leave, she suddenly urged her husband into the station, told him quickly that she would be much happier if she knew he was with Lucie, and assured him she would be at *Noiraude* only an hour or two after him.

Once alone, she hurried from the station. But instead of going up Amsterdam Street towards her town house, she made her way on foot towards the boulevards. It was a bright April morning, the air redolent of spring, and though gusts of warm, cloying air were blowing up, the atmosphere was as a whole quite invigorating. One side of the streets was still wrapped in bluish shadow, the other, lighted by a long belt of yellow sunshine, glowed golden and purple. Madeleine strode along in the sunshine, on the sunlight-flooded pavement. Once outside the station, she slackened her pace, and continued on her path slowly, pensively.

She had decided on this the day before. Faced with that threat of a visit from Jacques, all her vigour had come back to her. While she was still asking Tiburce for the address she had been thinking: 'Tomorrow, I shall let Guillaume go, and when I am alone, I shall go and see Jacques, tell him everything, and beg him to leave us alone. If he promises never to try to see us again, I shall account him once again dead. My husband will never know I have done this. He is far too timid to accept the necessity of it. Later, he will think it was chance that protected us, and he will grow as calm a I shall be. Besides, if necessary, Jacques and I can invent an exchange of letters, some sort of excuse for a quarrel.'

All night this plan had turned in her head. Details were modified, the things she was to say to her former lover were thought out, gentler ways of putting the brutal truth were devised. She was tired of terror, tired of suffering, she wanted an end to it all. Danger had awakened in her the rough, practical daughter of boiler-maker Férat.

Now she had already accomplished the first step in her plan. She was alone. It had only just struck 8 a.m. She did not intend to call on Jacques till nearly midday. That meant four long hours to wait. But the delay did not worry her. She was under no compulsion. There was not a trace of fever in her decision. It had resulted solely from an act of reason. Thinking how good it was in the sunshine, she decided to stroll about till it was time. She meant to adhere scrupulously to her plan, without advancing or retarding a single detail of the course on which she had cold-bloodedly decided.

For years Madeleine had not found herself alone like that, strolling along the pavements. It took her back to the days of her affair with Jacques. Having time to spare, she began to look at the shop displays, with interested eye, especially for the jewellers and the milliners. She felt a sort of spiritual well-being, lost like that in Paris, in the April sun. When she reached the *Madeleine*, she was glad to see it was one of the flower-market days. She crossed to it and paced slowly between two rows of flower-pots and bunches of flowers, standing some time gazing at masses of fully-opened roses. When she had reached the end of the alley between the stalls, she returned on her steps, again pausing, meditative, before each lot of flowers. All about her, in a flood of sunlight, were patches of greenery shot with the liveliest of colours, reds, violets, blues, all with the softness of a velvet carpet. A penetrating scent flooded

round her feet and crept intoxicatingly, languorously, up her skirts. She had the feeling that as it reached her lips, this perfume faintly scorched her cheeks, like a love caress. For nearly a couple of hours she stayed there, wandering to and fro down the fresh-scented market alleys, her eyes lost among those masses of flowers. Gradually her own cheeks turned pink and a faint smile came to her lips. She was quite dizzy with it all, as if she had leant over a wine-vat.

At first her sole thought had been of the step she was proposing to take. Her mind resumed its night thoughts: she saw herself entering Jacques' flat and repeated to herself the words with which she was going to tell him that she was Guillaume's wife, then pondered on the reaction this avowal was going to make. Hope was returning to her. She told herself that she would go back to *Noiraude* with peace in her heart, nearly cured, to resume with her husband that peaceful life they had once known. Then, her hopeful thoughts having as it were lulled her anxiety and softened her spirit, she slipped slowly to still vaguer dreams. She forgot all about the painful scene which was so soon to take place and completely gave up worrying about her decision. Intoxicated by the scent of the flowers and warmed through by the sun, she just went on walking, yielding to a sweet, fugitive meditation. The notion of the tranquil life she was going to lead with Guillaume took her back to happy memories of her life. The past filled her heart, a past of delight and love, till all at once the image of her husband vanished, and she saw only Jacques. However, he no longer tormented her, but smiled as he once had done. Again she saw the Soufflot Street room and recalled certain April mornings which she had spent with her first lover in Verrière woods. She was happy she could think of all that without pain and so she plunged ever deeper into her memories, no longer conscious at all of the present, not even asking herself why she was waiting till midday, and all the time walking in that powerful redolence of roses, permeated through by growing softness.

When at last people had begun to eye her with curiosity, she decided to go somewhere else to stroll, and went to the *Champs Elysées*, carrying her dream with her. The walks in those vast gardens were almost deserted. She found a vibrant silence there. However, she was utterly indifferent to her surroundings. She went a long way, then made her way back to the *Madeleine*, there once again forgetting herself in the warm, perfumed atmosphere of the market, again coming to that sense of voluptuous swooning, when she suddenly noticed that it was a quarter to twelve. She had just time

to run to reach Taitbout Street in time. Hurrying, she made her way along the boulevards, still intoxicated by sun and flowers. Her head indeed was swimming, and she was no longer able exactly to recall what she had resolved to say. But she went on, as if a fatal force was urging her, and was breathless and scarlet when she got there.

Nevertheless, without a trace of hesitation she mounted the stairs. Jacques himself opened the door. When he beheld her, he uttered a delighted cry.

"You, you!" he cried. "Well, well, lass, I must say I hardly expected to see you this morning."

He had closed the door behind her, and now led her through a series of elegantly furnished small rooms. Without a word, she followed. He took her to the end room, the bedroom, then turned and gaily took her hands.

"So we've stopped being angry, eh?" he said. "You know, you weren't very nice to me at Mantes, were you? So you've come to make peace, eh?"

Still silent, she stared at him. He had just got up. Still in his shirt sleeves, he was smoking a clay pipe. In his new situation of rich young man, he was still the untidy student and sailor. To Madeleine he seemed utterly unchanged, exactly as he was in the photograph over which one night she had wept. His unbuttoned shirt revealed his bare skin.

He had sat down on the edge of the unmade bed, the bedclothes trailing on the floor, still holding the hands of the young woman standing facing him.

"How the devil did you find out my address?" he asked her. "Wanted to love me again, wanted to seek me out? Tracked me down, eh? But first, let's sign our armistice!"

With a single movement, he drew her unresisting to him and planted a kiss on her neck. She let him do it. Leaning now against his knees, she found herself in a sort of stupor. Though she had climbed only a few stairs, she was panting. She felt utterly drunk. The room swam. Her mind took it all in through troubled eyes. Seeing a large, faded bunch of flowers on the mantelpiece, the *Madeleine* market flashed through her mind again. Only in this moment did she recall that she had come to tell Jacques she had married Guillaume. Unaware of the smile playing on her lips, she turned to him. Jacques meanwhile had slipped one arm round her waist.

"My dear child," he said, laughing throatily. "Believe me or not, but since you refused to take my hand, I have dreamt of you every night. . . . Say, d' y' remember our little room in Soufflot Street?"

His voice had suddenly become resonant and passionate. His hands were already exploring the warm folds of his former mistress's gown. A shudder passed through him, partly a shudder of the morning freshness, partly from the burning desire which had welled up in his breast. Had Madeleine come at any other hour of the day, it is doubtful if he would have drawn her to him quite so swiftly. For her part, from the first instant, when she found herself collapsing against his knees, she had felt her strength ebbing away. A biting, disturbing scent arose from this man, and through her limbs coursed a hot flood. A confusing noise filled her ears, an unconquerable desire for slumber forced her eyes to close. She kept telling herself: 'I came up here to tell him everything, I am going to tell him everything,' but the thought faded out in the depths of her mind, like a voice drawing farther and farther away, growing ever fainter, till she could no longer hear it at all.

It was Madeleine whose body, falling heavy suddenly against Jacques', forced him back on to the bed. In a frenzy, he turned and seized her, swinging her up off the floor which her feet already scarcely touched. She responded to his embrace as a horse to its old master's powerful knees. In the instant in which, deathly pale, eyes closed, she yielded herself, borne away in swooning state which robbed her of her very breathing, she had the feeling that she was falling from an immense height, turning and turning in slow somersaults replete with anguished delight. She knew quite well that in the end she must crash on the ground below, but despite this, that sense of being poised in absolute space swept her up to a dizzy peak of excruciating bliss. Every landmark had vanished. In that indefinability of her fall, while every sense lost consciousness, with clarity she heard a small clock strike midday, and the twelve strokes seemed to last a century.

When she came to herself, her eyes lighted on Jacques. He was walking up and down the room. She stood up, looking about her and trying hard to grasp exactly why she had lain down on the bed with this man. Then it all came back to her. Slowly, she repaired the disorder of her toilet. There was a mirror in a wardrobe at which she could do up the auburn tresses which had fallen loose about her shoulders. She was senseless, utterly annihilated.

"Going to spend the day with me?" asked Jacques. "Let's have dinner together."

She shook her head and slowly adjusted her hat.

"What? Going already?" he cried, in astonishment.

"I am pressed for time," she replied, in a strange voice. "They . . . they are waiting for me."

Jacques burst out laughing. But he did not insist. When he had accompanied her out to the landing, he kissed her and said: "Some other day, when you can slip away, to come and see me, do try and have the whole day. . . . We might go out to Verrière."

She turned to face him, as if these words had stung her. For a moment she stood thus, her lips parted, to speak. Then, with a wild gesture, without a word of answer, she ran down the stairs and escaped. She had not been with Jacques more than twenty minutes. Once in the street, she began to walk feverishly, head down, not knowing where she was going. The noise of the traffic, the jostling of other foot passengers, all the confusion and noise and movement which surrounded her were lost in the whirlwind of sensations and thoughts in which she was borne. Two or three times, as if attracted by the display in them, she halted at shop windows, yet saw nothing, and each time resumed her wild course, her walk more frenzied than before. Over her countenance was drawn the stupid mask as of one intoxicated. Hearing her muttering to herself, passers-by turned and stared.

"What sort of woman am I then?" she whispered to herself. "I went to that man to raise myself in his eyes, and I fell into his arms like any whore. He had only to touch me with his finger-tip, and I offered no resistance. Indeed, I found degrading enjoyment in feeling myself yield to him." She raced on, then began again talking to herself, with sullen fury: "And I was so strong this morning, I had worked it all out, I knew just what I was going to say! I must be accursed, as Geneviève says. My flesh is foul! Oh, how filthy!"

She made a gesture of disgust and rushed past shops and buildings like a madwoman.

She had been racing about like that for an hour when suddenly she halted. Thought of the morrow, of the days she would now have to live, suddenly confronted her. She looked up, to see where she was. Her steps had automatically led her back to the *Madeleine*. At her feet again she saw the displays of flowers, those huge bunches of open roses the perfume of which had gone to her head that

morning. Once again she walked through the market, now telling herself that she would commit suicide and that would be an end to it. She would suffer no longer. Then she went to Boulogne Street. Some days previously, she had come upon a big hunting-knife in a drawer, and as she walked she saw that knife, saw it open before her. Constantly before her eyes, it mesmerized her, drew her on, led her back to that Boulogne Street house. She told herself that in a minute she would have it in her hand, she would strike herself down. But when she started up Clichy Street, such a suicide repelled her. Before she killed herself, she would have to see Guillaume, she must explain to him why she was doing it. Only then did her fever die down, and it seemed loathsome to her to cut her throat.

She turned back and, reaching the station, just managed to catch a train for Mantes. During the two hours journey, there was one single thought in her mind: "I shall do it at *Noiraude*, as soon as I have proved to Guillaume that I must."

The regular, monotonous jolting of the train and deafening noise of the wheels in a strange fashion lulled her in this set idea of suicide, till she seemed to hear the wheels echoing the very word: *suicide, suicide*. . . .

At Mantes, she took the coach. Leaning her elbow on the door, she looked out at the countryside. Beside the road she suddenly recognized those houses she had noticed in the night some months earlier, when she drove that way in the brougham with Guillaume. Now, dwellings and countryside all seemed to repeat the one single thought beating in the depths of her being: "*suicide, suicide*".

She left the coach a few minutes before Véteuil, where a cross-country lane led straight to *Noiraude*. Dusk was falling, a dusk of exquisite gentleness. The quivering skyline melted into the night. The fields turned black under a milky sky which quivered with the sound of footsteps on stone and dying songs in the depths of the dying day. As she made her way along a path bordered by hedges with wild roses, she heard somebody coming her way. Then a cracked voice broke the silence. It sang:

"A Turkish pasha of sordid fame
Lord Mustapha was his name
For his harem did he get
Miss Katinka in his net
With a tra-la-la, and a tra-la-lee
Tra-la-la-la, tra-la-la-lee."

It was Louise! In this hour of melancholic calm, this trolling of hers assumed a tone of pained sarcasm. It was like the tearful laughter of a sentimental madwoman. Madeleine stood still, rooted to the spot. The voice and the song, heard like that amid the quivering of the evening, brought to her mind's eye a swift, painful vision. She recalled former excursions to Verrière. As night fell, she was again walking through the woods. Louise was arm in arm with her and they were both singing that ditty about Mustapha the Pasha. Far away, along other walks lost in the shadows, other girls' voices answered them with other ditties. Through the foliage they caught a glimpse of white frocks, like clouds of mist, creeping across at ground level, melting into the darkness. Then everything was pitch dark, and the distant voices became plaintive as throats well moistened with absinthe sang scabrous lines which floated softly, with soft, penetrating sentiment, through the evening air.

These memories choked her. All this time she could hear Louise coming towards her. She shrank back, so as not to have to face this woman, whose miserable silhouette she could already distinguish. After a brief silence the madwoman's voice rose again:

"A Turkish pasha of sordid fame
Lord Mustapha was his name
For his harem did he get
Miss Katinka in his net
With a tra-la-la, and a tra-la-lee
Tra-la-la-la, tra-la-la-lee."

Then, terrified by the mad laughter of the half-demented wretch, and moved to tears by her hoarse, sad voice, which in the freshness of the oncoming April night, so clearly recalled her own youth she forced a way through the thorn hedge and escaped across the fields, and so reached *Noiraude*. When she opened the iron gate, she noticed that the laboratory window, in the attics, was glowing red, shedding a sinister light all over the gloomy front of the mansion. She had never seen a light there before, and that unusual, lurid glow against the twilight sky filled her with an inexplicable feeling of alarm.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

At *Noiraude* a new blow awaited her. That afternoon, her little daughter had died.

When he arrived, Guillaume found the child on her death-bed, the victim of one of those sudden bouts of fever which sometimes supervene when convalescence seems well on the way. Burning with fever, her little hands seeking cool patches of sheet, she thrust her poor trembling little arms out of the bed. Then attacks of delirium made her toss about, struggling, expressionless, against something invisible on which her blank, staring eyes seemed to be fixed. One would have said that her eyes held her whole face, and now, like clear spring water muddied by a cloud of fine sand, this slowly clouded over. When he entered the room, she did not recognize him. He bent over her and stared at her with agonized expression. He felt his heart would break. As every fresh sound of the rattle in her throat lacerated his heart, he told himself that she was after all entirely his. Terrible regret that he had ever repulsed her bound him to her side, bent over her, wishing he might clutch her to him and wrestle with death for her. With unspeakable anguish, all his love for the child had reawakened in him.

Nevertheless, Lucie was definitely dying. For an instant her delirium left her, and she gave him a lovely little spoilt-child smile. Then, looking all about her, as if waking, she seemed for an instant to remember and recognize it all, and, holding out her arms to her father, several times murmured that familiar little phrase of hers, into which she instilled all the sweetness of a caress:

"Take me, take me."

Dumbfounded, thinking her saved, Guillaume bent lower. But just as he was about to raise her up, he felt a sudden shudder snap her little body, and Lucie was dead. When he had laid her down again, he knelt speechless beside her. He could not cry, and soon he no longer dared even look at her, for death had already pursed her lips, so that again they had shaped themselves just like Jacques' own in a solemn moment. Terrified by this trick of the rigidity of death, in which thus little by little on the countenance of his daughter was eternalized the likeness of the other man, he forced

himself to continue his prayers and see only the little one's hands, now crossed on her breast. But despite his will, his eyes constantly moved up towards her face. In the end he left the room, leaving Geneviève alone with her.

When Madeleine entered the hall, she had a presentiment of misfortune. The living-room was cold and black, the house seemed deserted. From the first floor came a funereal chanting. Thus she reached the room where, with Geneviève at her side, intoning prayers, Lucie lay dead. This frightful sight which awaited her, the child's face, utterly drained of blood, lost in the pillow, and the old fanatic on her knees praying by the uncertain light of a candle, froze her in the doorway. With one look she had understood everything. Slowly, she entered the room. Since morning, she had lost all thought of her child. Now, she felt a kind of delight, finding her dead. This was one important hindrance less to her suicide. Now she really could kill herself without the thought that behind her she would leave a pitiable little girl, by her very birth dedicated to misfortune.

When she reached the bedside, she shed not a single tear, merely telling herself that very soon she would be like that herself, stiffening and cold. Had she too not been thus already consigned to death, no doubt but she would have flung herself sobbing over the dead body. But the certainty that soon she would be no more prevented her feeling the loss of her child. Nevertheless, she felt she must kiss Lucie one last time. But, as she bent down, she thought she saw Jacques before her. Lucie seemed to have assumed her lover's lips, those lips which she had so voluptuously kissed only that very morning. With a terrified start, she drew back.

Geneviève, who had broken off her prayers, saw this movement of fright. In her implacable way she peered up at Madeleine.

"Thus are punished the children of the guilty," she muttered, without once taking her eyes off her. "God punishes sinners in their descendants, for ever."

Madeleine was overcome with fury with this old crone who invariably, at every fresh misfortune, crossed her path, then cast those monstrous beliefs in her face.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she cried. "Do I look so peculiar? I had forgotten you, forgotten you would be sure to pour the venom of your tongue over me. I should have known that I would find you present up to the very last minute, your arm raised, pitiless as destiny. . . . You are my fate and my punishment."

The old fanatic's eyes gleamed. With frenzied delight, in a sort of prophetic ecstasy, she declared again and again:

"The hour is coming! The hour is coming!"

"Oh, I have had enough suffering," cried Madeleine. "I crave punishment now! I shall punish myself! . . . But not because you condemn me! You have never done wrong, you have never lived, so you can never judge life. . . . Have you no consolation to offer?"

"No," the old Protestant replied. "Your tears must flow! You must render thanks to the hand that chastises you!"

"Can you make Guillaume love me again, so I recover my peace? Can you promise me that I alone will suffer when at last I humiliate myself?"

"No. If Guillaume suffers, that will be because of his own guilt. God knows where he strikes."

With supreme strength, Madeleine drew herself to her full height.

"Very well," she said, "if you can do nothing, what are you here for? Why torment me? I have no need of your God. I judge myself and punish myself!"

Exhausted, she broke off. Looking down, she saw the corpse of her child. Lips parted, Lucie seemed to be listening, and Madeleine was suddenly ashamed of this fit of rage and the words she had spoken, lashing like whips across the pitiable little body in its last sleep. For a moment she was engulfed in a vision of ultimate non-being. It seemed to draw her into it. She had already tasted the frenzy of death. Lucie's inert tranquillity, that expression of absolute repose now fixed upon her features, promised Madeleine too never-ending sleep, for ever lulled to rest in the arms of nothingness. A strange desire came to her: she wanted to know how long it would need to be frozen and rigid like that.

"When exactly did she die?" she asked Geneviève, who had resumed her prayers.

"Noon," snapped the old Protestant.

This curt response came down on Madeleine's head like the blow of a sledge-hammer. Could it really be that Geneviève was after all right, and it was her sin that had killed her daughter? For as the clock struck twelve she had been fast in Jacques' embrace, at the very hour when Lucie was dying. The coincidence seemed full of fatality, atrocious. Her own love murmurs now confused with the death rattle of her child. As she thus set side by side that scene of sexual delight and the scene of death, her reason left her, and she was broken. For a long time she was senseless. At last, coming to,

she asked herself what she was doing there. What had she come to *Noiraude* for? She could not tell, her brain was a vacancy. With real anguish, she kept asking herself: "Why, why did I hurry so here from Paris? I had a plan, what was that plan?" She made frantic efforts to recover her memory. And then, all at once, it all came back to her with absolute clarity. Of course, of course, she had come here to do away with herself.

"Where is Guillaume?" she demanded of Geneviève.

The old woman shook her head vaguely. She did not know. She never once stopped champing the indecipherable words of her prayers. Only then did Madeleine recall that red glow which she had seen coming so strangely from the laboratory windows when she was at the carriage gate. She left the death-room and quickly went upstairs.

Guillaume was indeed in the laboratory. When he had rushed out of the room where Lucie had just passed away, he first took refuge in the park, where, crazed with grief, he had walked about till nightfall. When like fine ash dusk descended, lending the whole countryside a uniform grey hue of painful melancholy, he felt a biting desire to take refuge in some miserable hole where he might satisfy the need for self-annihilation which he felt. It was then that automatically, in obedience to a savage force, he went to the drawer where long ago he had hidden the key of the room in which his father had poisoned himself. Since that time he had not set foot there. He himself could not have explained the irresistible urge to go up there which now possessed him. It was a sort of thirst for horror, a mad longing to drain to the dregs all the dismay and suffering his world contained.

When he entered the laboratory, the huge room, dimly lit by the candle he held in his hand, seemed dingier and more dilapidated than ever. In the corners the heaps of wretched debris of the furnace, the shelves and equipment still lay there. Nothing had been touched, only the dust of five years had accumulated on the ruins and the spiders dropping from the ceiling had spun webs which, ragged and black, came down to the floor. The atmosphere locked in this sinister place was asleep, a thickened, sickening atmosphere. Guillaume put the candlestick down on the table and stood beside it, looking all round him. A swift shudder passed through him when at his feet he distinguished the dark stain left by his father's blood. Then he listened. He had a presentiment that here, amid all this filth, the final blow must fall. This room, so long

untouched by any footstep, seemed to have been waiting for him, unhurriedly but how sinister, throughout these five years of false dreams. Now it opened to him and drew him into itself, as if he were prey long since promised it.

Expectant and fearful, Guillaume thought back over his life of suffering, thought of how ever since his youth his flesh and his spirit had suffered cruel blows of fortune. Once again he ran through his terror-stricken childhood. Then came the painful years at school, and next, the recent months which he had lived, with all their madness and anguish. It all hung together, everything thrusting him on to some terrible end which could no longer be far away. Now that the facts, whose implacable, logical advance he followed, had thrust him into the heart of this room stained with his father's blood, he saw that he was ripe for death, and guessed that now, in one last brutal act, destiny was going to finish with him.

He had been listening thus nearly half an hour, an inner voice intimating to him that another person would come to deal him the supreme blow, when down the corridor he heard footsteps approach, and Madeleine appeared in the doorway. Wrapped about her she still had her travelling rug, nor had she yet had time to remove either gloves or hat. With one swift glance she surveyed this laboratory which she had never entered. The locked room had sometimes been discussed in her presence, and she knew the grim story connected with it. When she perceived the disgraceful disorder of it, a strange smile curled her lips: how fitting it would be to end it all amid this filth, this desolation. It seemed to her, just as it had seemed to Guillaume, that this room had been awaiting her for years.

She went straight up to him. "I have come to talk about something, Guillaume," she said. Her voice was cold and precise. All her feverishness seemed to have left her. She held her head high, her eyes were resolute, she had the inexorable attitude of a judge.

"A few months back," she said, "when we left that inn at Mantes, I asked a favour of you—to let me die when the life of torment you and I were leading became unbearable. I have not succeeded in lulling my mind to rest or achieving my heart's peace, and I have come to remind you of the promise you made me that day."

Guillaume did not reply. He guessed what reasons his wife was about to give him, he expected them, he was ready to accept them, he had no thought of trying to defend her against herself.

"Look what a state we have reached," she continued. "Here we

are, both of us, backs to the wall, run to earth at last in this room to which the facts of our lives have driven us. Every day we have lost a little more ground, every day felt the iron ring round us close in a little more, limiting the room left us. One by one, every place has become uninhabitable for our poor, sick minds, first our cottage, then the little Paris house, now even our dear *Noiraude* living-room, even the bedroom where now our child has died. Now we are enclosed here, in this remote retreat, this last refuge of our insanity. Were we to emerge from here and try any further, it would be but to fall still lower and lead a life still more disgraceful, still viler. . . . Am I not right?"

"You are right," Guillaume replied.

"Here we are, face to face, unable to exchange word or look without wounding each other. I no longer belong to you, I belong to memories which in the night hours find me out and rend me apart with horrible nightmares. You know it all, you once wakened me when I had given myself to a dream and lay in its arms. For that reason you no longer dare take me to your breast, is that not so? Guillaume, I am too full of that other man. I think you are jealous, but you are also desperate, you are at the end, just as I am. . . . Is that so?"

"It is so."

"Thus our love, if it were now continued, would be a wretched love. It would be vain to blind ourselves. There would come those moments when I saw through your weariness or your loathing, or you read the thoughts and the shameful enjoyment in me. We can no longer live together. . . . Is that so?"

"It is so."

His replies were like an echo, but an echo which was clear and trenchant as a blade of steel. The dignified, tranquil bearing of his wife had stirred all the pride of blood in him. There was no weakness left now. Accepting bravely the fatal end which he thought to discern, he was determined at last to out-do that nervous frailty of his.

"Unless," Madeleine continued, bitterly, "unless you wish to live apart from me, you in one room, me in another, like some married couples who merely put up with each other in the eyes of the world, just for appearances' sake. We have just seen some such couples in Paris. Would you care to try that sort of life?"

"No," the young man cried. "I love you still, Madeleine. We love each other. It is that which kills us, is it not? If I cherish

you, it is because I want to remain your husband and your lover. You saw quite well in Paris that we could neither of us bring ourselves to that selfish way of living. We must live in each other's arms, or stop living altogether."

"Good, then let us be logical. It is the end of everything. As you say, it is our love that kills us. If we did not love each other, we could live in peace, but always to love and always to befoul one's heart's dearest affection, craving embraces at every moment and yet afraid even to touch fingers, passing my nights beside you, but held to another's breast, when I would give my life-blood to be able to attract you to me, that, Guillaume, would in the end send us out of our minds, you know. . . . It is all over."

There was a short silence. Their eyes exchanged glances full of conviction. Still terrifyingly calm, Madeleine asked herself if she had perhaps forgotten any of the reasons which compelled her suicide. She wanted to act coolly, be quite sure that all hope was lost. She did not want to fling herself into death in a mad fit, but on the contrary, to take refuge there when she had proved the impossibility ever of being healed. Again she insisted on the reasons prompting her.

"Let us do nothing against reason," she said, "but just remind yourself of the facts. . . . I wanted to end my life in that inn. But then, I have never confessed this to you before, it was the thought of little Lucie that held me back. Now our child is no more, now I can depart. . . . I have your promise. . . ."

"You have," replied Guillaume, "and we shall die together."

She shot him a glance of mingled astonishment and terror. Then, swiftly: "What's that you say?" she cried. "No, Guillaume, you need not die. That was never my idea. I don't want you to die. That would be a useless crime."

Guillaume made a frantic gesture of protest.

"You have forgotten," he said, "I should be left to suffer, all by myself."

"But who wants you to suffer?" she cried, scornfully. "You mean you would be weak again? You would be afraid to cry? Were it only a matter of grief, I would stay behind too and struggle on. But I am the cause of your ill, I am your running sore, and I am going, because I am in your way."

"You shall not die alone."

"I beg you, Guillaume, do spare me, do not make my sin greater. If I drag you down with me, I shall be still more at fault and I shall die in desperation. . . . My body is cursed, it turns all about me to

gall. When I no longer exist, you will grow calm and can try to find happiness again."

Guillaume was loving his coolness and calm. The thought that he might be left to suffer alone left him aghast.

"But what do you think I shall do without you?" he cried. "If you die, nothing remains for me but to die. Besides, I want to punish myself, I want to punish myself for my weakness, my failure to save you. You are not the only guilty one. . . . You know very well, Madeleine, unless you mean to leave me to go to pieces in weakness, I am a child of nerves whom you must take in your arms and carry away with you."

Madeleine felt the truth of what he said, yet the mere thought that by dealing a blow at herself she was hurting her husband yet again, was unbearable. She did not reply. She hoped that his ecstatic mood would go again and she would then be able to bend him to her will. But now, however, Guillaume had ceased to be reconciled with what she proposed.

"Let us try, let us try again," he stammered. "Stay with me, have pity on me."

"And what to expect? For how long?" she demanded, fiercely. "All is not finished, then? But just now you agreed that it was. What, do you think I cannot read your eyes? Dare you tell me that my death is not what you really need?"

"Let us try, let us try, somehow else," he repeated, now beside himself with agitation.

"Why utter such empty words? Useless to try, we should not find any cure. You know it too, you are only talking to hush up the thoughts in you which try to tell you the truth."

Guillaume wrung his hands.

"No, never!" he cried. "You cannot die so, I love you, I shall not let you kill yourself before I go."

"It is not suicide," she answered, gravely. "It is punishment by death. I have tried myself and I have condemned myself to death. Let me now be my executioner."

She saw him begin to weaken, and in harsh, domineering tone, continued:

"I would have done it this morning in Paris, in our house there, as for a moment I intended, had I known you would be so weak. But I thought I had no right to finish myself off till I had told you the reasons for my death. See, I am perfectly sane."

With a sublime cry of despair, he cried: "You should have done

it without telling me, I would have followed. . . . You and your reasoning, how cruel they are."

He had sunk back, weakening, to lean against the table. Madeleine now decided to bring it all to its close. She felt tired. She longed to find rest in death as soon now as she could. A hidden selfishness now made her abandon her husband to his fate. Now that she had done all she could to save him, she would go tranquil to her eternal sleep. She did not feel she had the courage to live on longer merely to give him life.

"Don't argue so," she said to him, looking swiftly about her. "I must die, can't you see it? Don't say no. . . . Let me do it!"

Her eyes had just found that little marquetry inlaid cabinet in which Guillaume's father had locked the new poisons he had discovered. A few minutes earlier, as she went up the stairs, she had told herself that she would fling herself through the window. There were three floors, she would surely be killed, crashing to the flags below. But the sight of that cabinet, on the glass of which the Count's finger had written the one word *Poisons* in large letters now made her seize at this other method of killing herself. With a gesture of delight she rushed over to the cupboard.

"Madeleine, Madeleine!" cried Guillaume, in horror.

Cutting her knuckles badly, she had already broken a pane with her fist, and seized the first bottle her fingers lit on. But by now Guillaume had caught her by the wrists, so that she could not put it to her lips. He could feel the warm blood of her cut hands wetting his.

"I'll break your arms," he said, "before I let you drink that. I want you to live!"

She stared into his face.

"You know that is out of the question," she replied.

She struggled grimly, with violent jerks trying to free her hands. But her husband had them fast. Panting, he repeated: "Give me that bottle, give me that bottle."

"Look here," she said, her voice hoarse, "don't be a child! Let me go!"

He did not reply. He strove to open her fingers, one by one, to get the little bottle away from her. His hands were smothered with blood from her cuts. Just as she felt she had no more strength left, she seemed to try a last supreme move.

"Do you mean that all I have just told you has not made it clear enough that I want to die and it is cruelty to refuse it me?"

He still did not reply.

"Then you don't remember any longer," she went on, more fiercely now, "that inn room where I slept with my lover? You have forgotten that table on which I wrote: *I love Jacques*, those blue curtains I had to draw those stifling July nights?"

When she pronounced that name, a tremor passed through Guillaume, but this only made him still more fiercely try to get the bottle. Then Madeleine really did go mad.

"Very well then," she cried. "I meant to spare you the last anguish, but you force me to be brutal! . . . I lied this morning! I had not forgotten anything! If I stayed behind in Paris, it was to go and see him. I wanted to keep him away from us. But I was like a cat on heat, I fell straight into his arms. . . . Understand, Guillaume, I come to you straight from Jacques' embrace!"

Under the sudden blow of this avowal, Guillaume did at last release her hands. His hands fell limp to his sides. He stared stupidly at his wife, then slowly drew back from her.

"Ah, now at last you do see," she said, with a weird smile of triumph. "You give me your consent to my death."

Still he crept backwards, away from her, till he came up against the wall, and there he leant, staring all the time at her. A stupefied anxiety kept him bending towards her, the better to follow her every movement. She raised the bottle, and showed it him.

"Guillaume," she said, "I am going to drink this. You give me your permission, don't you?"

He did not utter a word, but his eyes started from their sockets and his teeth chattered loudly. He drew his shoulders in a little, as if preparing to run, and, thus making himself small, watched the frightful sight before him, from which he could not tear his eyes.

Slowly, Madeleine raised the bottle and with one gulp swallowed the contents. As she drank, she kept her eyes on her husband. The effect of so powerful a dose of the poison was shattering. Swinging round, arms flung out, she collapsed on to her face, then one vast convulsion contorted her body. The luscious coil of auburn hair at her nape came unpinned and flooded over the floor like a pool of blood.

Not one detail of this swift scene had Guillaume missed. As his wife drank, he had crouched still lower, till now he was sitting on his heels against the wall. And when, with hollow thud, like a block of lead, she collapsed to the floor, he felt the boards shudder

under his feet and it seemed as if her fall, echoing in his head, was splitting his skull.

For some instants he stared over the table at the corpse, then, uttering a penetrating yell, leapt to his feet in one great bound and began to dance about the laboratory, to the beat of his blood-stained hands, as he clapped in time with his feet in an hysterical burst of delight. Thus he circled the room a number of times, trampling broken sherds underfoot, kicking the rubbish into the centre of the room as he went. Finally, setting both feet together, like a boy playing leap-frog, he took a standing jump over his wife's dead body, and his laughter grew louder and louder, as if he found the trick very funny.

At this same instant Geneviève appeared in the doorway. Immobile, rigid, just like fate, she swept the long, sinister room with a glance, this room with its foetid atmosphere, its rubbish-filled corners, and that single candle which scarcely lightened the darkness. When at last she made out the corpse prone on the floor, at which the lunatic laughing and dancing diabolically in the shadows seemed to be kicking, she drew herself very erect and in her dry voice pronounced the words:

"God the Father did not forgive!"